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SOCIAL MEDIA AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION

A case study on Germanwings' and Lufthansa's use of social media in crisis communication

Master's Thesis in
Public Management

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	
ABSTRACT	5
1. INTRODUCTION	7
1.1. Research questions and objectives	8
1.2. Research methods	8
1.3. Structure of the thesis	9
2. CRISIS MANAGEMENT	11
2.1. Crises and crisis types	11
2.2. Crisis management	14
2.3. The three-stage model of crisis management	16
2.3.1. The pre-crisis stage	16
2.3.2. Crisis response	17
2.3.3. Post-crisis	19
2.4. Fink's four-stage cycle	19
3. CRISIS COMMUNICATION	23
3.1. Defining crisis communication	23
3.2. Theories on crisis communication	27
3.2.1. Situational Crisis Communication Theory	28
3.2.2. Discourse of Renewal Theory	31
3.2.3. Chaos theory	32
3.3. Phases and functions of crisis communication	33
4. CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA	37
4.1. Defining social media	37
4.1.1. Types of social media	38
4.2. Functions of different social media in crisis communication	40
4.3. The new media environment and digital publicity	43
4.4. Social media in crisis communication	45
4.4.1. Theories on social media crisis communication	45

4.4.2. Opportunities and challenges	47
4.4.3. Best practices	50
5. CASE STUDY: THE USE OF TWITTER IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION	55
5.1. Introducing the case and data analysis	55
5.2.1. Initial response	59
5.2.2. Procedures taken by the airlines after the crash	64
5.2.3. References to other social media	66
5.2.4. Sympathizing	70
5.2.5. Final note	74
5.3. Conclusions	75
6. CONCLUSIONS	78
6.1. Conclusions and findings	78
6.2. Reliability and limitations	80
6.3. Suggestions for future research	81
 WORKS CITED	 82
 APPENDICES	
APPENDIX 1. Lufthansa's first tweet (Lufthansa 2015)	88
APPENDIX 2. An informative tweet (Lufthansa 2015)	89
APPENDIX 3. A link to a YouTube video featuring the CEO of Lufthansa (Lufthansa 2015)	90
APPENDIX 4. Last tweets (Lufthansa 2015)	91

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Types of crises (Coombs 2015: 2, 22)	13
Figure 2. Three phases of crisis management (Coombs 2007a)	16
Figure 3. Ideal types of crisis communication (Olsson 2014: 117)	26
Figure 4. Three types of crisis communication theories and examples (Liu & Fraustino 2014: 543)	28
Figure 5. Situational factors (Coombs 2015b: 143)	29
Figure 6. Functions of crisis communication (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 14)	35
Figure 7. Different types of social media used in crisis management (Wendling, Radisch & Jacobzone 2013: 12)	42
Figure 8. First tweets (Germanwings 2015)	60
Figure 9. Confirmation (Germanwings 2015)	63
Figure 10. An update by Lufthansa (Lufthansa 2015)	64
Figure 11. Message by Germanwings (Germanwings 2015)	65
Figure 12. Commenting on investigation (Germanwings 2015)	66
Figure 13. Daily summary (Germanwings 2015)	67
Figure 14. A link to a YouTube video featuring the CEO of Lufthansa (Germanwings 2015)	68
Figure 15. Link to Facebook (Lufthansa 2015)	69
Figure 16. A tweet by the CEO of Germanwings (Germanwings 2015)	70
Figure 17. Expressing emotions (Germanwings 2015)	71
Figure 18. We are in mourning (Germanwings 2015)	72
Figure 19. A tweet by the CEO of Lufthansa (Lufthansa 2015)	73
Figure 20. Final tweet (Lufthansa 2015)	74
Figure 21. Facebook message signifying end of crisis communication (Lufthansa 2015)	75

Table 1. A comparison of Coombs' and Fink's staged approaches (Coombs 2015a: 9)	21
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ABSTRACT:

Social media has become an integral part of communication, both among the public and organisations. Traditional theories on crisis communication are challenged by the emergence of social media and the active participation of citizens. Social media allows information to be shared quickly across communities and even countries, having the power to turn local crises into global ones. The thesis will focus on how organisations can use social media in crisis communication.

Crisis communication is an integral part of crisis management. Theories of crisis management and crisis communication will be discussed in the thesis, crisis communication forming the main theoretical framework. In addition to crisis communication, the concept of social media will be examined and how it has affected crisis communication strategies. The role and functions of social media in crisis communication will also be discussed.

The research methods used in this thesis are qualitative and descriptive. A case study was chosen as a research method to provide an example of how an international organization has used social media, or more specifically Twitter, in its crisis communication. The data for the case study was gathered from The organisation's Twitter account, consisting of posts made by the organization in the first months of the crisis.

What became evident during the research was that it is crucial for organisations to use social media as a crisis communication tool to communicate effectively. During crises, social media functions as a platform for people to look for and share information, find support and discuss what has happened, for example. Organisations should not only be present in social media but actively participate in conversing with the public. Social media is about interactivity, openness, communities and transparency and organisation are expected to behave in such a way too when in social media. However, traditional media should not be forgotten in crisis communication. Organisations are required to incorporate different channels of communication, which creates new challenges but also opportunities.

To conclude, social media should not be ignored when planning crisis communication. To meet the needs of the public and to save an organisation's reputation, organisations are recommended to incorporate social media in their crisis communication. Organisations have several ways of doing that, by getting to know the logic behind social media and how they can most effectively communicate with the public.

KEYWORDS: crisis communication, social media, crisis management

1. INTRODUCTION

Crisis management is becoming more and more important in a global world, where crises have the possibility to change existing systems and organisations drastically, not only locally but also internationally. Crises may take the form of a natural disaster or an accident caused by a human error for instance, causing disruption but also renewal. Crisis communication is a significant part of crisis management, as it helps organisations to deal with crises during and after a crisis has erupted. Theories of crisis communication focus on explaining the communication process of different agents that takes place during and after crises. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 1) Crisis communication is an ever-evolving area of research as it is affected by social, economic, environmental and political changes. For instance, the advancements in Internet technologies and the growing significance of social media have an effect on communication traditions and the current media environment.

Crisis management and crisis communication are widely studied areas of research. However, as crises are unique and case-specific, new theories continue to be developed (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 2). Professor Timothy W. Coombs has published many books and articles on crisis communication and continues to do research in the area, integrating social media into his theories. Professor Laurence Barton is another expert in the field of crisis management, known for his book *Crisis Leadership Now: A Real-World Guide to Preparing for Threats, Disaster, Sabotage and Scandal*. Traditional crisis communication theories are being challenged, however, by the changing media environment and use of social media.

Social media creates new challenges for crisis management and crisis communication. Crisis managers and communication specialists need to consider the ever-growing importance of social media and the fast flow of information it allows. However, the role of social media and its impact on crisis communication have not been broadly studied yet, as it is quite a young phenomenon. (Jin, Liu & Austin 2014) Thus, theories on social media crisis communication are in few and more research on the effects of social media on organisations' crisis communication strategies is required. This thesis will concentrate on how organisations can use social media as a crisis communication tool and how

it has become such an important part of communication strategies. The objectives and the research problem of this thesis will be discussed next.

1.1. Research questions and objectives

The main objective of this paper is to examine the use of social media in crisis communication by organisations. In order to reach the objective, the thesis will examine how social media has influenced traditional crisis communication as well as organisations' crisis communication strategies. From these objectives, a research question was formed. The main research question is how can organisations use social media as a crisis communication tool?

To answer the research question, the author will present different theories on crisis management and communication and examine the different functions of social media. The main topics of the thesis, crisis communication and social media, will be examined both separately and together. The empirical part of the thesis will concentrate on examining the use of social media in crisis communication through a real-life example.

1.2. Research methods

In the pursuit of answering the research question and reaching the objectives of this paper, suitable research methods were chosen. A case study was chosen as the main research method. The following citation defines case study research from a qualitative point of view.

Case study research is an inquiry that focuses on describing, understanding, predicting, and/or controlling the individual. (Woodside 2010:1)

The word individual used in this definition refers to a person or groups, processes or organisations, or even to cultures or nationalities, for instance. In this thesis, the object of case study research is the crisis communication process of an organisation. Presented next is another definition that focuses on the aims of a case study.

A case study is one which investigates the above to answer specific research questions and which seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the case setting, and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers to the research questions. (Gillham 2010:1)

The organisation's crisis communication will be examined, or investigated, based on evidence, which in the chosen case study entails social media messages created for and used in crisis communication by the organisation in question. The data will be analyzed by using qualitative methods.

According to Gillham (2010:10), qualitative methods are the core of case study research. Qualitative research methods refer to interpretive and descriptive analysis of data. Unlike quantitative research methods which focus on measures and statistics, qualitative research methods concentrate on understanding meaning behind different phenomena. (Gillham 2010: 10) Both case study research and qualitative research methods can be descriptive by nature, and they are thus appropriate for the objectives of this study. Descriptive methods aim to answer to such questions as how, who and what (Woodside 2011: 11). The case study in this thesis will hence focus on describing the case examined as interpreted by the author.

1.3. Structure of the thesis

The research problem will be approached through both theory and practice. The thesis will start with providing theory on crisis management in order to get an idea of the context from which crisis communication derives from. The thesis will end on the presentation and analysis of the case study and final conclusions.

Chapter two will focus on defining crises and crisis management. Chapter three will concentrate on theory on crisis communication and again, different theories will be presented. Chapter four will look at how social media has changed the environment in which crisis communication functions and what opportunities and challenges it will cre-

ate for organisations. The fifth chapter will cover the empirical part of the thesis, which is based on a case study examining the use of social media as a crisis communication tool by a specific organisation. The case will be presented in this chapter.

The final chapter concludes the thesis by drawing together major points discussed in the thesis and any findings made. Suggestions for further research will be provided and the validity and reliability of the study will also be discussed.

2. CRISIS MANAGEMENT

As crisis communication is an integral part of crisis management, it is important to understand what is meant by the word crisis and familiarize oneself with the concept of crisis management. In this chapter, the concept of crises and crisis management will be defined and different theories on crisis management presented.

2.1. Crises and crisis types

Before moving on to discussing different crises types, a general description of what is meant by organisation will be given. The modern conception of organisations consists of five determinant factors that make an organisation. First, an organisation consists of members and has clear boundaries that separate it from other organisations. Second, an organisation has its own identity shared by its members, and recognized by others. Third, an organisation has a clear goal that its members acknowledge and share. Furthermore, an organisation is formally structured and that structure is also clearly represented. Last, an organisation and the external environment are different units, and do not need to interact with each other. (Huhtala & Hakala 2007: 114)

Even though other theories contesting the modern theory, such as the post-modern theory, exist, the above definition includes some of the commonly identified characteristics of organisations. For instance, organisations are acknowledged to have members and have a shared goal and identity. Organisations can be public or private, such as governmental agencies or international companies for instance. Huhtala et al. (2007:5) note that crisis communication and its strategies are mostly the same for all organisations, whether they are public or private for instance.

Coombs (2015a: 3) distinguishes two types of crises, disasters and organisational crisis. Disasters Coombs defines as large, sudden events that cause disruption and require the participation of several governmental agents. Disasters can also cause organisational crises and even in some occasions organisational crises can lead to disasters.

Organisational crises too, are unpredictable and they can have a negative effect on an organisation's performance and image. A crisis, in comparison to an incident for example, has an impact on the organisation as a whole or has the potential to do so. An organisational crisis can cause harm to an organisation's stakeholders and negatively impact their safety, health or economics for instance. Coombs (2015a: 3) argues that a crisis "is the perception of an unpredictable event" and emphasizes the perceptual nature of crises. By saying this, Coombs refers to the idea that a crisis exists if the stakeholders of an organisation believe the organisation is in a crisis. As mentioned before, crises are unpredictable, sudden events yet organisations can expect them to happen without knowing when and where.

In Coombs' (2015a: 22) more recent work, he goes on to distinguish two broad types of organisational crises, which are traditional crises and social media crises. Traditional crises disturb an organisation's operations, may cause harm to its stakeholders and threaten the safety and welfare of the public, whereas social media crises tend to cause harm to an organisation's reputation. Nonetheless, traditional crisis also have an effect on the organisation's reputation and social media crises can also be related to public safety. Often, social media crises can be described as paracrises, meaning that they are not crises yet but they have the opportunity to become one. (Coombs 2015a: 23) Figure 1 represents the different types of crisis discussed.



Figure 1. Types of crises (Coombs 2015: 2, 22)

Crises can be inevitable, in the case of natural disasters for instance, or they could be avoided in the case of man-made crises. Nonetheless, a crisis affects the organisation as a whole and can have serious implications on its reputation and operations, among other things. (Mitroff & Anagos 2000: 6) A crisis can be seen to cause three types of threats that are interrelated. These threats concern the safety of the public, financial losses and the loss of reputation. Usually, a crisis affects the reputation of the company inevitably as well as the financials of an organisation either directly or indirectly. (Coombs 2007a: 1)

Crises can negatively affect an organisation's reputation by disrupting the relationship between the stakeholders and the organisation. Stakeholders trust an organisation to work or act in a certain way, but a crisis can disrupt the organisation and its functioning. This can cause negative feelings among the stakeholders which then affects the organisation's reputation. Crises can also have other negative effects and outcomes on an organisation. In addition to financial losses, crises can damage the environment, cause physical injuries to its stakeholders or it can lead to changes throughout the affected industry. Coombs (2015a: 4)

Mitroff and Anagos (2000: 34-35) distinguish major risks and crises that all organisations may face. These include economic crises, natural disasters, crises related to human resources, informational, reputational and physical crises, and also psychopathic acts. These different categories of risks and crises all involve different acts or events that can harm an organisation and the public. For example, a kidnapping or violence are psychopathic acts whereas revealing confidential information is an informational crisis.

2.2. Crisis management

Crisis management aims at dealing with crises that can cause harm to the public and to an organisation. The purpose of crisis management is to protect the organisation and also public safety. On an organisational level, crisis management can help to protect the reputation of the organisation, the well being of its employees or its financial assets for instance. Prevention of crises is as important as minimizing the effects of a crisis that has already happened. (Coombs 2007a)

Crisis management also involves other organisational functions, such as communications and risk management. Crisis management can be seen as an interdisciplinary practice which also uses psychology and sociology for example, as basis for its theory and practices. After all, crisis management is not only a procedure that is implemented after a crisis has happened. Crisis management is also about planning and strategizing on how to react if a crisis occurs and how to move on from a crisis. (Lockwood 2005; Seeger & Sellnow 2013)

Coombs (2015a: 5) outlines four interdependent elements of crisis management. They are prevention, preparation, response and revision. Prevention refers to precautionary actions that focus on preventing a crisis from happening. In effective crisis management, risks and warning signs are detected and appropriate action is taken to stop them from building up to a crisis. Preparation in crisis management includes actions such as making a crisis management plan, creating a crisis communication system as well as choosing a spokesperson and identifying crisis vulnerabilities. Preparation is one of the

most commonly identified elements of crisis management, states Coombs (2015a: 5), as the concept of a crisis management plan is common to many.

The goal of response is to minimize the damage crises can cause to an organisation and its stakeholders, and thus response is an important component of crisis management. Unlike prevention and preparation, response is an element of crisis management that is public. Response requires putting the elements of preparations into practice and how the organisation responds to a crisis is usually actively followed and commented on by the media. Recovery is a component of response as it refers to getting the organisation back to its daily operations as fast as possible after a crisis. Returning to normal operations fast can help minimize financial damages.

Revision is the last element of crisis management and an important part of it is evaluating what was done well and what was done badly. Evaluation of the actions taken covers all elements of crisis management, from prevention to response and recovery. The element of revision can lead to organisational learning and better crisis management in the future. (Coombs 2015a: 6)

Many theories have been developed to try and explain crises, even though they are often unpredictable and each crisis is different. Staged approaches that divide crises into stages are some of the most acknowledged and used theories about crisis management. Staged approaches provide models on crisis development that divide crises, irrelevant of their type or the industry they hit, into chronological stages of a crisis' life cycle. Different models have a different number of stages and different terminology. The benefit of these models however, is that they allow crisis managers to evaluate and plan their crisis communication needs in advance. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 27) Two of these models, the three-stage model familiarized by Coombs and Steven Fink's four-stage model, will be discussed in more detail in the next subchapters.

2.3. The three-stage model of crisis management

Coombs (2007a) identifies three stages of crisis management. The first stage is called pre-crisis, the second stage is crisis response and the third stage is post-crisis. This three-stage crisis model is widely used to analyze crises as well as in theories of crisis communication (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 30).

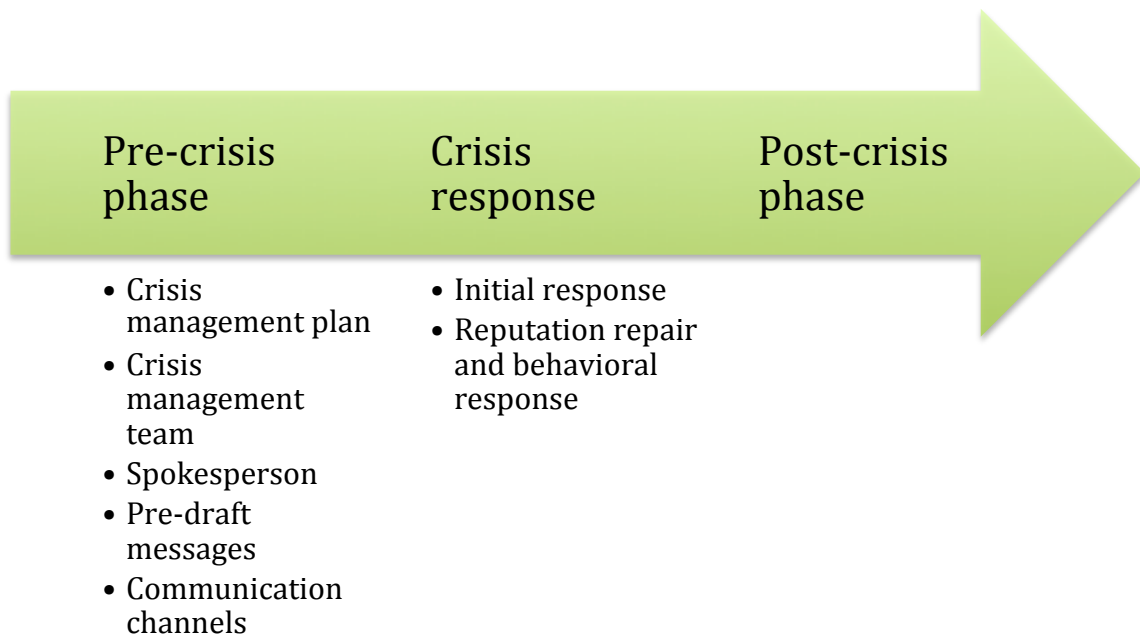


Figure 2. Three phases of crisis management (Coombs 2007a)

Figure 2 represents the different stages of crisis management and the different steps taken within each stage. The three stages will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-chapters.

2.3.1. The pre-crisis stage

The pre-crisis stage involves different steps essential to crisis management that focus on preventing crises. In order to be able to prevent a crisis from happening, known risks are identified and efforts are taken to diminish those risks. During this phase, a crisis management plan (CMP) is formed and a crisis management team is established. In addition

to this, spokesperson training is given and pre-draft messages are planned. Also, communication channels are identified or established.

The purpose of making a crisis management plan is to have some guidelines and references to what should be done in a crisis situation. It can include necessary forms or contact information for example. The crisis management team comprises of representatives from different departments and fields. For example, the team may include a legal counselor, an HR representative and a person responsible for public relations. The team members are assigned to different tasks depending on the crisis management plan. Coombs (2007a) highlights that both the crisis management plan and the crisis management team should be regularly tested and evaluated, in order for them to work accordingly in time of crisis. The pre-crisis stage also includes the training of members of an organisation on how to deal with media. Spokesperson training is required for the representatives of the organisation to be able to answer question related to the crisis, without worsening the situation.

Creating pre-draft messages that can be used in the case of a crisis is another step that can be taken during the pre-crisis phase. Creating pre-draft messages, or templates, that can be filled according to the nature of a crisis save time in amidst a crisis. The pre-drafts can be formed by the cooperation of public relations and a legal counselor, of which the latter approves of them. Appropriate communication channels are chosen during the pre-crisis phase. A communication channel can be, for example, an Intranet or the organisation's public website. Choosing which kind of communication channels to use depends on the nature of the crisis and the decision of who should know and what should they know.

2.3.2. Crisis response

The second stage of crisis management is crisis response, which comprises of the initial response and of the reputation repair and behavioral intentions. This stage focuses on action taken when an organisation faces a crisis and includes the strong involvement of public relations. The initial response to a crisis is advised to be quick, accurate and con-

sistent. (Coombs 2007a) The pre-crisis stage and the plans made during that stage can help the organisation to respond quickly. It is important for the organisation to respond to the crisis immediately, especially when considering the media. If the organisation does not come forward and provide information, the news media or other people outside the organisation will usually fill the void. The other benefit of reacting quickly to a crisis is that it creates an image of control and trustworthiness.

Accuracy and consistency during the initial response go hand in hand. Giving incorrect information requires correcting it, which then can lead to an image of inconsistency and incompetence. If false information is given, it must be corrected. When a crisis happens, it is unlikely that only one person has to answer questions regarding the crisis, and that is why training a spokesperson beforehand is highly important for the organisation, as discussed earlier in this paper. In case the crisis threatens the public and public safety, accuracy and a fast response are even more important, as well as communicating with the public.

There is also one additional step which is suggested to be included in the guidelines of initial response to a crisis. (Coombs 2007a) The third aspect concerns addressing the victims of the crisis. Victims may include employees, their families or the public, and may have suffered financial losses or physical trauma. Addressing the victims and their families may help in trying to save the organisation's reputation. In incidents, where the injuries are serious or even deadly, offering counseling and support for the victims and their families is also part of crisis management.

A crisis usually always has an impact on the reputation of an organisation, as discussed earlier in the thesis. Thus, reputation repair and the strategies to do that are important for crisis management. Reputation repair can be part of both crisis response and the post-crisis stage, however, in some cases it might not be needed if crisis response has been conducted successfully. Reputation repair will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

2.3.3. Post-crisis

During the post-crisis stage, the crisis has passed or at least it is mostly over. The post-crisis stage may include reputation repair or it may not. The post-crisis stage usually still involves communication with the media, employees or customers for example. How to keep those involved up-to-date about what is being done to recover from the crisis will depend on the type of the crisis and the type of the organisation, as well as the crisis management plan and strategy. (Coombs 2007a)

According to Coombs (2007a) the post-crisis stage is also important for the organisation itself as well as for the theory of crisis management. It is important for the crisis manager and the crisis management team to review how the crisis was handled, what was done right and what could be improved.

2.4. Fink's four-stage cycle

Steven Fink compares crises to a disease and uses medical terms in defining the four stages of crises. He was one of the first to conceptualize crises in such a way and his approach to crisis management helped in familiarizing the concept of staged approaches. Fink considers crises to be dynamic and changeable by nature, and he also believes crises can lead to institutional and social change. The four stages of Fink's model are prodromal, acute, chronic and resolution. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 33-34)

The prodromal stage, a medical term, refers to warning signs that can be detected before a crisis strikes, similar to symptoms before an illness. Fink suggested that when these warning signs are detected and understood, yet this might not always be possible, the crisis is more manageable or can even be prevented. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 34) Thus, identifying warning signs that may lead to crises and acting on them requires crisis managers to be proactive. Successful detection of these signs allows the managers to have more control over the crisis by being able to minimize risks and plan ahead.

The second stage in Fink's model is the acute stage, which refers to the eruption of a crisis. Fink suggests that crisis type determines the speed of a crisis. The extent and duration of the crisis on the other hand, are dependent of the procedures followed during the prodromal stage. The crisis can be attempted to be controlled by strategic crisis communication, for example, by focusing on the content, tone or timing of a press release for instance. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013:34)

The chronic stage is the third stage of the model. According to Fink, the chronic stage may last for years or even for decades. Healing, reconstruction and self-analysis and doubt are some of the main functions of this stage. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013:35) The chronic stage can be seen as an extension of attempting to resolve the crisis after the acute stage is over. The chronic stage can be seen as the aftermath of a crisis, focusing on dealing with issues that linger long after a crisis has passed.

The final stage of the model is resolution. The resolution stage marks the end of the crisis and that the stakeholders are not affected by it anymore. Fink argues the main objective of crisis management is to reach the resolution stage, and thus reaching the resolution stage is an indication of successful crisis communication. Getting to the final stage, however, can be indefinite in time, as the length of the chronic stage can vary and take years. However, taking appropriate action during the prodromal stage can help in reaching the resolution stage faster. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013:35)

Some differences can be found between Fink's four-stage model and Coombs' three-stage model. The three-stage model offers a simplistic view on the stages of crises whereas Fink uses different terminology and has an additional stage. Moreover, the medical terminology Fink uses and his view of crisis and the stages of crises being comparable to an illness differ significantly from Coombs' division of the stages of crisis. Table 1 demonstrates the stages of the two development models in comparison to each other.

Three-stage model (Coombs)	Four-stage model (Fink)
Pre-crisis	Prodromal
Crisis	Acute
	Chronic
Post-crisis	Resolution

Table 1. A comparison of Coombs' and Fink's staged approaches (Coombs 2015a: 9)

The most notable difference, however, is the difference between the pre-crisis stage and the prodromal stage. Fink emphasizes the difference between the prodromal stage and the pre-crisis stage by suggesting that whereas the pre-crisis stage can only be detected after a crisis has happened, the prodromal stage can already be detected before a crisis erupts (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 34). During the prodromal stage symptoms, or warning signs, can become evident through monitoring and thus, they can be addressed by crisis managers accordingly.

The pre-crisis stage and the prodromal stage, as well as the post-crisis stage and the resolution stage are parallel in the table presented above. The crisis stage defined by Coombs, however, entails both the acute and chronic stages of Fink's four-stage model. Whereas Fink makes a distinction between the acute stage, referring to the eruption of a crisis and the application of crisis communication strategies, and the chronic stage which may last for years, Coombs' stage of crisis changes to the post-crisis stage once the crisis has been resolved. (Coombs 2015a: 9)

The post-crisis stage can be argued to contain elements of the chronic stage, such as reconstruction and healing, thus challenging the clear-cut comparison of the two models in question. Fink's resolution stage ends the crisis with lingering issues already being solved during the chronic stage, whereas Coombs' post-crisis stage may still include self-analysis and follow-up procedures. Also, Coombs' three-stage approach does not take into consideration the lingering effects of a crisis that Fink's view of the chronic

stage represents, further emphasizing the difference between the views of the crisis being resolved according to the two development models.

3. CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Crisis communication is an integral part of crisis management. It plays a role in preserving and re-establishing an organisation's reputation as well as in informing the stakeholders of a crisis, both during and after. This chapter will focus on defining crisis communication and discussing different theories as well as examining different phases and functions of crisis communication.

3.1. Defining crisis communication

The Oxford Dictionary defines communication as “the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium” or as “the successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings”. These definitions convey that communication is a process of more than one participant and also involves the concept of sharing, not only one-way transmitting. Theorizing and defining communication differs between doctrines and it can adopt different meaning and emphasis depending on the context. According to Seeger and Sellnow (2013: 10) the traditional view on communication focuses more on the role of the sender portraying the receiver as more passive of the process resulting in seeing communication as a linear event. However, theorizing communication has thus developed and many see it as a more dynamic process, including the active participation of both the sender and the receiver as they together construct meaning. In a nutshell, communication can thus be defined as a process of constructing meaning and as a shared interpretation or an understanding between a sender(s) and a receiver(s), for instance, between organisations and the public (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 11). Yet, different views on the process of communication and also how meaning is constructed exist.

Hakala (2011) identifies three approaches to communication, which are the transmission model of communication, the ritual view of communication and dissemination. The focus of the transmission model of communication is on getting the message through to its receivers, fast and efficiently. The transmission model offers a linear view of communication, where the line of communication can be easily followed and evaluated. Hence, in the case of communication failure the mistake can be easily detected. Communication

is mostly one-way and its aim is mostly to inform. The ritual view of communication emphasizes the importance of not only content, but also how the content is communicated. Communication is seen to enforce the sense of community, as well as maintaining and sharing it. On the contrary to the transmission model, the ritual view acknowledges also the receiver and their interpretation of the message. Lastly, dissemination refers to spreading information. The background and the situation of the receiver are more relevant than the sender's context. (Hakala 2009: 16-17)

The transmission model of communication can be seen as communication which is not interactive and where the direction of communication is top-down. This type of communication does not allow the participation of the receivers, and the sole purpose is to pass down information in an effective manner. The ritual view of communication however positions communication as an integral part of communities and their functioning. More attention is paid to the content and delivery of the message, rather than just passing a message on. Dissemination can be considered more as broadcasting or publishing information, as the role of the receiver is only to receive and not to reply. Dissemination of information is more often directed at multiple individuals or groups, rather than just single individuals.

As the concept of communication itself is complex and different views exist, it proposes the same issue for crisis communication. Moreover, as crises are unexpected and unique events constructing a consistent theory on crisis communication is challenging. Thus, crisis communication can be seen as a constantly evolving practice, which aims to construct meaning between different actors in order to prepare and respond to a crisis.

Crisis communication and the methods used to communicate have an impact on the organisation's reputation and survival as well as on people affected by the crisis. Crisis communication may save an organisations image or it can worsen it. Also, improper communication in time of a crisis may even put the public or employees in danger. The main goals of crisis communication are to provide information about the crisis as quickly and accurately as possible. Transparency and taking responsibility in managing a crisis are important in the process of crisis communication. (IATA 2014: 5) Crisis com-

munication can be seen to serve as a crisis management tool that has many purposes and functions in the different stages of crises. Thus, crisis communication can be seen as an ongoing process starting from the preparation for crises continuing to the overcoming of a crisis and learning from it.

Some common features of crisis communication can be identified. As crises are typically sudden events, which may not have been foreseen, crisis communication needs to be fast and informative. Getting a message across to the audience about the occurring event is an important part of crisis communication, but it also makes the communication process a “one-way event”. The aim of crisis communication is to be informative and to notify the audience of the event and potential danger. (Walaski 2011:11) According to Coombs (2015b:142) two different crisis communication strategies can be distinguished. The first strategy is managing information and the second strategy is managing meaning. Managing information refers to the process of gathering and publishing information related to a crisis. Managing meaning on the other hand refers to the organisation’s attempts to influence people’s perceptions of the crisis and the organisation the crisis concerns. Chosen crisis communication strategies will depend on an organisation’s decision on what is wanted to be achieved.

Olson (2014: 116-117) identifies two dimensions of crisis communication, consisting of four types of information that can be used in crisis communication. The first dimension focuses on resilience-oriented information and reputation-oriented information, and the second dimension focuses on strategic information and operational information. Resilience-oriented information refers to the use of crisis communication in helping a community to overcome a crisis. The aim of providing such information is to promote renewal and to strengthen relationships. The other form of information in the first dimension is reputation-oriented, indicating organisation-focused information. This type of information focuses on protecting or repairing an organisation’s reputation and credibility.

Part of the second dimension of crisis communication is strategic information. Strategic information is again organisation-focused and aims to help the organisation overcome a

crisis. Strategic information is generally well planned in advance and focuses on long-term results. Operational information on the other hand is aimed at those affected by a crisis and for them to have necessary information about the crisis. The following figure represents the four types of information used in crisis communication, suggested by Olsson (2014: 117).



Figure 3. Ideal types of crisis communication (Olsson 2014: 117)

Reputation-oriented information is typically sender-oriented, whereas resilience-oriented information is receiver-oriented. As explained previously, resilience-oriented information is aimed at stakeholders and possibly the public to provide them with information that can help them deal with a crisis. Receiver-oriented information on the other hand, in this case reputation-oriented information, aims at protecting or saving the

organisation from reputational damage. The type of information communicated in a crisis will depend on the strategies an organisation has decided use when dealing with crises.

3.2. Theories on crisis communication

Different crisis communication theories exist and they offer different strategies on how to plan and implement crisis communication. Theories on crisis communication concentrate on the messages and meaning construction that surround unexpected, crisis events (Seeger & Sellnow 2013:2). Different theories emphasize different outcomes of crisis communication and they represent different ways of dealing with crises. Liu and Fraustino (2014: 543) suggest that existing crisis communication theories can be divided into three categories. They are the image-making crisis communication theories, resilience generating crisis communication theories and the complexity-understanding crisis communication theories. These theoretical approaches entail different crisis communication theories that provide different ways of understanding and dealing with crises through communication.

The prevailing theories on crisis communication concentrate on reputation and image repair. These theories focus on saving an organisation's image and protecting its reputation, and thus protecting it from other negative effects of a crisis. These image-making theories include the widely used Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) introduced by Coombs and image repair theory, for example. On the other hand, resilience generating crisis theories concentrate on how to move on from a crisis. Discourse of renewal for instance does not focus on image repair, but rather on recovering from a crisis together with the public. Complexity-understanding theories include theories such as the chaos theory and the complexity theory, which emphasize the intricate nature of crises.

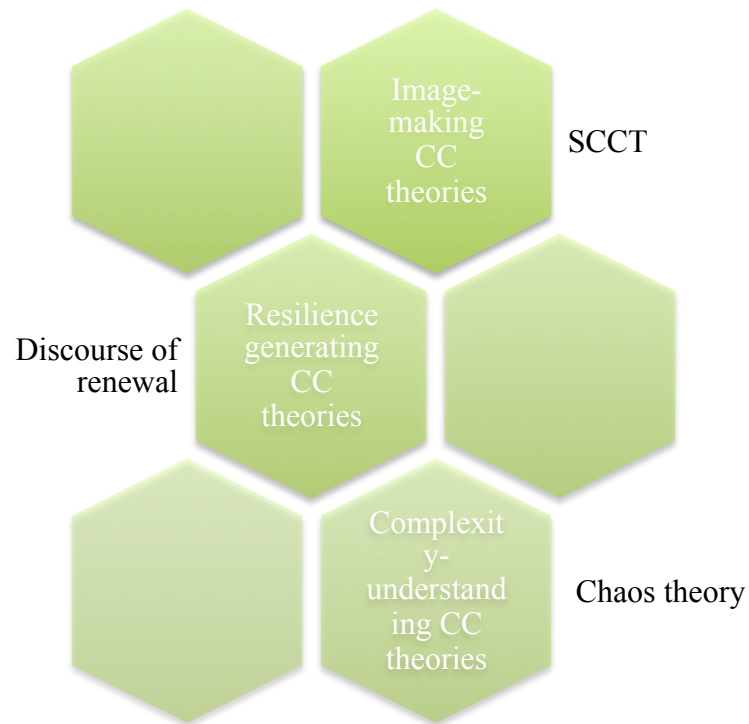


Figure 4. Three types of crisis communication theories and examples (Liu & Fraustino 2014: 543)

The figure above represents the three main theoretical approaches on crisis communication and example theories, which will be discussed next in more detail.

3.2.1. Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) focuses on maintaining and rebuilding the reputation of an organisation that has faced a crisis, and how the public perceives the organisation and its handling of a crisis situation (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 91). SCCT is based on the attribution theory, which suggests that when sudden, negative events occur, people tend to look for reasons to explain them. Individuals look for someone or something to hold accountable for the events, and they react to these events emotionally, of which sympathy and anger are the main emotion according to attribution theory. The level of responsibility attributed on an organisation by individuals for example, will define whether it will be faced with sympathy or anger. (Coombs 2007b: 165-167)

According to Coombs (2007b: 163) SCCT aims to evaluate the possible damage a crisis has on an organisation's reputation and based on those predictions provide crisis response strategies to maintain the reputation of the organisation. Thus, the crisis communication strategy an organisation decides to use should be based on the reputational assets of the organisation and also on the type of crisis it is facing.

According to Coombs (2015b: 143), understanding the effect a crisis has on an organisation contributes to more successful crisis communication. Coombs uses the study of situational factors to identify how a crisis affects an organisation. Crisis responsibility, competence and integrity, long-term and short-term threat assessment and timing are four major categories used to represent the impact of a crisis on an organisation. (Coombs 2015b: 143) By examining these different factors more carefully and how an organisation can be negatively affected by a crisis, suitable crisis communication strategies can be formed and applied. The figure below represent the four situational factors being discussed.



Figure 5. Situational factors (Coombs 2015b: 143)

The concept of crisis responsibility comes from the attribution theory. Attribution theory focuses on how people perceive and feel about others in a situation of failure or success (Malle 2011: 79). In the context of organisations and crises, attribution theory refers to the level of negative feelings directed towards an organisation. Thus, an organisation is more negatively affected if its stakeholders, for example employees or customers, think that the organisation should bear more crisis responsibility. In this instance, this may affect the organisation's reputation in a negative way. Competence and integrity is another situational factor that can be used to understand how an organisation can be negatively affected by a crisis. Studies show that violations concerning integrity are perceived graver than those concerning competence. Therefore, if an organisation's integrity has been affected by a crisis rather than its competence, it may affect the organisation more negatively. Also, strategies on how to deal with competence or integrity-based crises differ.

A crisis and its effects on an organisation can be also assessed by the longitude of the crisis. Long-term and short-term threat assessment allows the magnitude of the crisis to be evaluated and also how it can be handled and how it may affect the organisation. Timing is the last of the four situational factors being discussed. Timing in this context signifies the time an organisation takes to provide information about the crisis. As discussed earlier in the paper, it is highly beneficial for an organisation to be the first to acknowledge and provide information about a crisis. By being the first to provide information about a crisis may reduce the risk of damages on the reputation of the organisation, as it might in a situation where, for example, the media was the first to report about the crisis. (Coombs 2015b: 144) Particularly as the media often tends to sensationalize organizational crises and try to place the blame on the organization in question.

Crisis response strategies provide frameworks for an organisation and crisis management to respond to a crisis. Crisis response strategies are thus part of crisis communication, mostly focusing on managing meaning. In crisis response, three groups of strategies can be identified. They are instructing information, adjusting information and reputation repair. The strategy of instructing information aims to protect anyone involved in the crisis from physical harm. Adjusting information aims to give support and inform

those affected by the crisis, and thus help them cope with the crisis and offer sympathy. (Coombs 2015b: 142) Reputation repair on the other hand concentrates on communication aimed to protect or improve an organisation's image.

Reputation repair, as discussed in the previous chapter, focuses on saving the reputation of an organisation. Reputation repair as a strategy can be divided into four subsequent categories: denial, redress, bolstering and reducing offensiveness. If denial is used as a strategy of reputation repair, the organisation states that it is not responsible for the crisis and should not be affiliated with it. On the contrary, using redress as a strategy aims to avoid negative image of the organisation by positive efforts towards the victims of the crisis. For example, giving compensations for the victims or apologizing and thus claiming responsibility for the crisis can help to achieve that. Bolstering also aims for a more positive reaction to the company by using information that portrays the organisation in a more positive light. The strategy of reducing offensiveness is less frequently used by organisations. This strategy undermines the extent of the crisis and only claims partial responsibility. (Coombs 2015b: 142-143)

3.2.2. Discourse of Renewal Theory

Unlike crisis communication theories based on image repair and protecting one's reputation, discourse of renewal theory focuses on post-crisis communication emphasizing organisational renewal and overcoming the crisis. Ulmer, Seeger and Sellnow (2007: 131) identify four characteristics of renewal which will be discussed next.

The discourse of renewal emphasizes the role of leaders and their importance in creating and communicating renewal. Thus, the characteristics of a leader and his or her ability to inspire are an important part in the communication of renewal as well as execution. When the emphasis is on renewal and moving on from a crisis, the leader often represents the organisation and its values. An appreciated leader can influence the opinions of the stakeholders more easily, as well as gain trust and reliability. (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow 2007: 132)

The aim of renewal discourse is not to be strategic, but to respond to an incident naturally and rapidly. The focus is not on saving the company and protecting its reputation, but to encourage renewal and progression. It is one of the four main aspects of communicating renewal and it also leans on the competence of the leader of the organisation. (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow 2007: 131)

Another important aspect of renewal is that its aim is to look forward, rather than in the past. The focus is on how the incident will be overcome and how to proceed from it, in contrary to image restoration where the communication is explanatory and focuses on what has happened and why. As renewal is more concentrated on the future, the nature of renewal is also based on positivity, of which without looking ahead might be more difficult. A leader with a positive outlook can see a way out of the crisis, by also improving and even benefiting from the crisis. Crises can teach an organisation to do something differently, for example to change practices and to improve safety issues. As an optimistic approach, the model of renewal allows an organisation to look at what can be done better after the crisis and whether there is room for new opportunities following a crisis. (Ulmer, Seeger & Sellnow 2007: 132)

3.2.3. Chaos theory

The chaos theory provides a view on how complex systems, such as organisations, behave and how crises affect them. The theory emphasizes the unpredictability and non-linearity of complex organisations as well as their dynamic nature. Sensitive dependence on initial conditions, also known as the butterfly effect, is an essential part of the chaos theory. The butterfly effect refers to the phenomena when even small changes or differences can have a profound effect on a system, for example, on an organisation or a crisis. Thus, the outcome of a crisis is strongly dependent on its initial conditions. The chaos theory suggests that making accurate predictions about the outcomes of a crisis is highly unlikely, if not impossible, due to their chaotic and dynamic nature. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 108-109)

According to the chaos theory, organisations that are complex, non-linear and dependent on other systems, or organisations, are more vulnerable to crises. These kinds of complex organisations, which are common in today's societies, are more prone to experience uncertainty and variance. Crises themselves are considered to radically disrupt the structure and character of an organisation. However, the chaos theory suggests that with disruption self-organisation emerges. Seeger and Sellnow (2013: 110) describe it as a natural process that is driven by an innate pull towards order and form. The process of re-structuring and self-organisation can even lead to a new, better-structured organisation that allow organisations not only to overcome the crisis but to rise from it.

Communication is seen to have two functions in the chaos theory. First, communication may function as a variant that causes larger changes in a system, and in some cases those changes can even lead to a crisis. Changes in communication process may also worsen the crisis outcome. Secondly, communication may function as a tool for self-organisation as well as a tool for organisational renewal. Communication can help in reorganizing and restructuring as well as creating new relationships and connections. Social media is an example of that, when in the time of crisis many resort to social networking sites, such as Facebook, to re-connect as well as look for support. Thus, communication through social networking sites can help in rejuvenating communities. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 111-112)

3.3. Phases and functions of crisis communication

Crisis communication and its functions can be divided into different stages. However, how to divide the steps of crisis communication varies. For instance, the functions of crisis communication can be divided according to the three stages of crisis: pre-crisis, crisis response and post-crisis. Theory on Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC), however, describes crisis communication as a five-step process, including additional phases such as maintenance and evaluation (Seeger & Sellnow 2013:41). As an example, the Finnish Government Communications Guidelines, outlined by the Prime Minister's Office, uses the latter in defining the different steps of crisis communication.

The five-step model of crisis communication consists of the following phases: pre-crisis, initial, maintenance, resolution and evaluation. The pre-crisis phase, as its name suggests, focuses on improving preparedness and providing information about potential risks. This phase also allows planning and testing of messages, as well as the systems used for communication in a crisis. The initial phase refers to the initial stages of an event, or a crisis. The purpose of communication during this phase is to provide information and messages of self-efficacy and reassurance, and to reduce uncertainty. Communication should be fast and accurate and aimed at both those affected by the crisis as well as the public. Communication in the maintenance phase continues to send messages of reassurance and self-efficacy. During this phase, communication can also focus on addressing rumors or correcting false facts. Increasing understanding of the ongoing crisis and risks is an important task of communication during this stage too. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013:41)

The resolution phase concentrates on providing the public with information about the causes of the crisis as well as its resolution. The resolution phase can increase the understanding of risks and also how to minimize those risks in the future. The evaluation phase, as its name suggests, evaluates the actions taken to handle the crisis. Communication during this phase is directed at those handling crisis communications and those who responded to the crisis, rather than then public. During this phase, the effectiveness of the communication plan can be discussed along with ideas how it can be improved. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013:41)

Applying crisis communication to the three-stage model of crises allows the categorizing of several different communicative functions into only three stages of communication. Coombs' model is simple and provides a more of a general view on the different functions and aims of crisis communication. The CERC model, though, covers different functions in more detail and draws clearer difference between the different stages of crisis communication, such as maintenance and evaluation, which in the three-stage model would fall under crisis response and post-crisis communication. Due to its simplicity and generality, Coombs' stages of crisis communication are easy to apply to different crises and cases, and other crisis communication theories can be easily juxtaposed with

it. When differentiation is important and the stages and functions of crisis of crisis communication want to be studied, other theories may prove to be more beneficial.

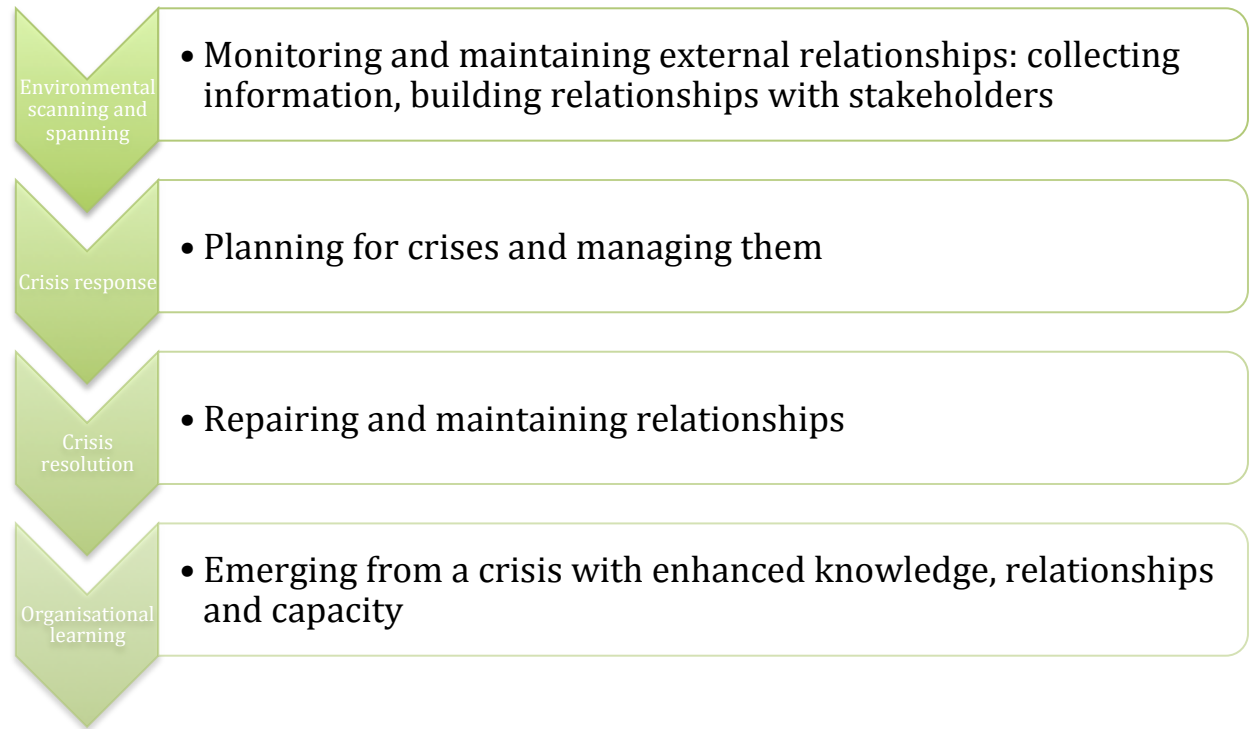


Figure 6. Functions of crisis communication (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 14)

Figure 5 shows different functions of crisis communication in different stages of a crisis. During the pre-crisis stage, it is important for organisations to monitor their environment and detect possible risks. The purpose of communication during this stage is also to build relationships with stakeholders, which can prove to be crucial when moving on from a crisis. In crisis response, communication can be used to provide information and give out warnings, for instance. This stage may include dissemination of information as well as collaboration with stakeholders. During the crisis resolution stage, communication is used for reputation repair or discourse of renewal, depending on the communication strategy an organisation has decided to use. Communication can also be used to show support, as well as grief and empathy for example. As for organisational learning, communication can help in rebuilding relationships as well as create

understanding and knowledge. At this stage, it also allows a dialogue between an organisation and the public, which during the crisis may have been difficult to accomplish. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 14)

The different functions outlined by Seeger and Sellnow (2013:4) do not follow the three-stage model of crisis communication or the CERC model directly. However, it showcases the flexibility of different stages and the applicability of different functions to different stages. The previous figure outlines different functions during four different stages, further emphasizing the different ways of distinguishing different stages of crisis communication.

4. CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN THE ERA OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This chapter will focus on examining the concept of social media and how social media has affected traditional theories of crisis communication. This chapter also covers some of the ways in which social media can be used in crisis communication by organisations and also examines the opportunities and challenges of its use.

4.1. Defining social media

Social media is a term that has become an important concept for organisations and the public. Nonetheless, varied definitions of social media exist. According to the Oxford Dictionary, social media refers to “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking”. This form of social networking often takes place on social network sites, such as Facebook or Twitter, where an individual can create a profile and connections with other users of the site and also make those connections visible to others (Boyd & Ellison 2008: 211). In these networking sites individuals share posts, news and photos for instance. Social media allows the distribution of any sort of information fast and to limitless number of readers or followers. Also, the developments in technology concerning smartphones and Internet allow social media be accessed all throughout the day every day.

The emergence of social media and its many applications and functions would not have been possible without technological and ideological advancements in the platform that provides social media applications. The World Wide Web became to be referred to as Web 2.0 in 2004, as it gradually developed into a platform which allowed its users to participate in the creation and modification of its applications and content. The term Web 2.0 thus refers to a more developed platform with more possibilities than its predecessor Web 1.0, which included applications such as personal websites and publishing of information of content. Common applications of Web 2.0 on the other hand, include different types of social media, such as blogs and wikis, which allow user-generated content. User-generated content is another term generally linked to social media, as it refers to the ways in which social media can be used. User-generated content describes content that is created by users of social media, for instance, and is public. User-

generated content can be seen to have existed already long before the existence of social media and Web 2.0, however, not in the same extent as today. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 60-61) The terms user-generated content and Web 2.0 are often used together to define social media, yet the distinction between them is not always so clear. The following definition of social media incorporates these two concepts by also distinguishing them from each other.

Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 61)

Social media can be identified to have five characteristics that are shared by the various social media applications and channels. These characteristics include participation, conversation, openness, connectedness and communities. Participation refers to users participating in content creation and giving feedback on it. Conversation refers to the possibility of interacting and discussing with others, and openness allows everybody to contribute. Connectedness refers to the connections to other content and the possibility of linking contents together. Communities on the other hand are groups of user with similar interests and they use social media tools to interact with each other. These set of characteristics are familiar features of social media and its application. The main component connecting these features together is interactivity. (Coombs 2015a: 19)

According to Hintikka (2015), the interactive nature of social media is what distinguishes it from traditional mass media. Social media allows its users to discuss and share information, as well as comment and critique. Social media, as its name indicates, enhances socializing and networking, as well as the sense of community.

4.1.1. Types of social media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 6) outline six different types of social media. These six different types are blogs, social networking sites, collaborative projects, content communities, virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds.

Blogs can be considered to be an early representation of social media which are upheld by one person. Even so, blogs often allow their readers to leave comments on the page. A text-based blog is the most commonly used form, and the text can tell about the writer's life, opinions and so on. Social networking sites include sites such as MySpace and Facebook. Social networking sites are based on personal profiles consisting of personal information, photos, blogs, videos and so on. People can connect with friends, new acquaintances and colleagues to view their profiles and send messages. Social networking sites are very popular which has led to many organisations and companies using those sites for marketing. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 63)

Collaborative projects refer to applications where the content of the site is created by its multiple end-users. The belief behind collaborative projects is that the input of several users is better than that of one individual. Wikipedia is an example of collaborative project, where anyone can add, change or delete information. Another example of collaborative projects is an application that allows users to save website links and give reviews on these websites. Content communities are a type of social media where the idea is to share media content without necessarily creating a profile. Several content communities exist for different types of media content, for example YouTube, a popular website for sharing videos, Flickr for sharing photos and Slideshare for sharing PowerPoints. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 62)

Virtual worlds can be divided in to virtual social worlds and virtual game worlds. Virtual worlds are based on interactions through avatars in three-dimensional surroundings. In virtual social worlds the interactions of the avatar replicate real-life behavior of the user. Applications for such sites include for example the Habbo Hotel and Second Life, which even allows its users to create content. As for virtual game worlds, the users are more bound by rules when playing online role-playing games, which connect users from all over the world to play simultaneously. Again, interaction happens through an avatar, which shape and nature is defined by the surroundings, or the game. Virtual worlds can be considered to be advanced representations of social media, as they combine both media content and social profiling. (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 64)

These categories are not etched in stone, as some applications can be a variation of different characteristics. Also, social media is a fast-paced domain where old applications lose interest and new ones are created constantly. It is difficult to say which social media applications will be popular in a decade for instance. After all, there is already a decrease in the interest of Facebook among teenagers. People may also engage in several different social media applications and use them simultaneously. Interest and usage of social media applications depend on their functions and the online community they host, for instance.

4.2. Functions of different social media in crisis communication

Three social media applications, namely Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, will be briefly introduced next. These three social media applications, which are some of the most used social media applications, will be also discussed later in the empirical part of the thesis. Hence, becoming familiar with the functions and characteristics of these specific applications is important.

Twitter is a micro blogging site, which was founded in 2006. In March 2015, Twitter had 302 million active users, with 500 million tweets sent per day. (Twitter 2015) A “tweet”, or a post, can contain only 140 characters, which differentiates Twitter from many other social media applications. Twitter posts, or tweets, are always short and due to this, they are fast to send, read and share. Twitter has a function of retweeting, or sharing an already existing post, that allows messages to be shared multiple times to various users. The immediacy and short content of tweets allows it to be effectively used in crisis communication. Research also shows that organisations that use Twitter as a crisis communication tool receive more positive results (Utz et al. 2012: 41).

Facebook was founded in 2004 and it functioned then as an application that allowed students from different universities to connect with each other. In the next couple of years, Facebook expanded outside universities and developed new functions. Facebook is the world’s largest social networking site with 968 million daily active users on aver-

age as announced in June 2015. (Facebook 2015) Facebook allows its users to share photos, create groups and send instant messages for example. Unlike Twitter, Facebook does not limit the length of posts and thus allowing longer posts and discussion. Facebook is based on personal profiles and connections made with other users. Many organisations uphold a profile on Facebook and for some, especially for small organisations, it can be the only official website providing information about the organization. Organisations can use it to post photos, provide information and talk with their customers.

YouTube was founded in 2005, around the same time social media was starting to take its form and many other major social media applications were founded. YouTube differs from Facebook and Twitter, as its main function is to share videos. Watching videos from YouTube does not require having a profile, however, uploading videos and commenting on them does. YouTube allows the creation and sharing of user-generated content and has more than one billion users. (YouTube 2015) YouTube might rarely be seen as a single social media application to be used in crisis communication, but it can be beneficial when incorporating it with other social media. YouTube can be used to post videos that may make crisis communication more efficient. These kind of videos may include instructions, statements made by the representatives of an organisation or live feed from affected areas.

The figure below demonstrates some of the ways different types of social media can be used in crisis communication. As can be seen from the figure, the advantages and functions between different types of social media vary. Thus, different applications can be used simultaneously for different purposes, and they can also be crosscutting. For example in Twitter, tweets may include links to content communities, such as YouTube, for real-time photos or videos or to websites asking for donations in the event of a natural disaster. Facebook on the other hand can be beneficial in reaching groups or communities affected by a crisis or to ask for and give support.

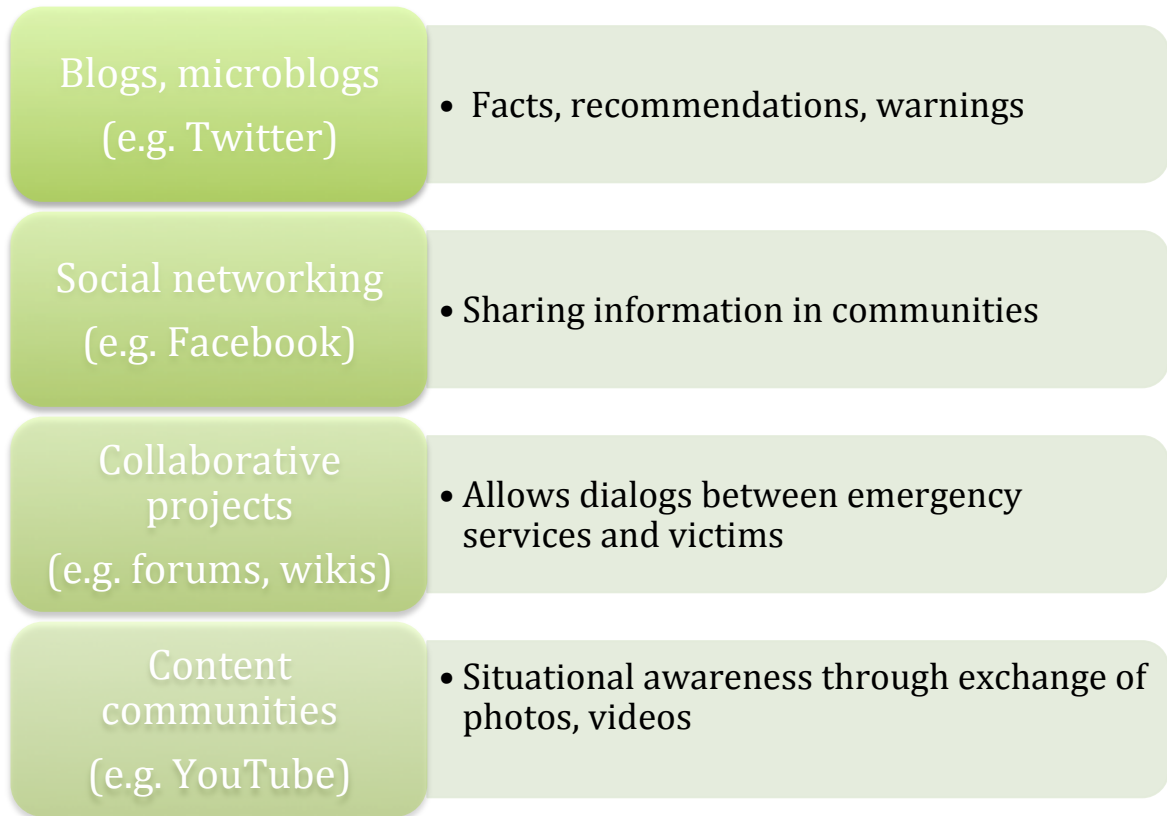


Figure 7. Different types of social media used in crisis management (Wendling, Radisch & Jacobzone 2013: 12)

Organisation using several social media can consequently use different social media during a crisis, or they may choose to concentrate on one. If an organisation is engaging in several social media, they may also use them for different purposes and to reach different stakeholders. For instance, an organisation may use Facebook to discuss with their stakeholders and use Twitter for short updates. Through YouTube, an organisation can share a video of instructions or a video message from the organisation's representative, for instance. After the crisis has passed, organisations may also continue to discuss about the crisis with its stakeholders in one social media and continue normal communications in others.

These examples demonstrate that different social media have several functions, as does a particular social media application. It is important for organisations to know which social media they want to or need to use in their crisis communication in order to effec-

tively communicate with their stakeholders and the public. Korpiola (2011:35) suggests however, that organisations should not base their crisis communication strategies concerning the use of social media too heavily on social media applications. Korpiola (2011:35) emphasizes that social media and its applications evolve fast and what is popular today might not be popular tomorrow. Organisations offering social media applications may face crises of their own too. Hence, concentrating only on highly used applications can become an issue when new, more attractive ones are created. For organisations it is not only important to know which applications their stakeholders use and how, but also how the logic of how social media works. (Korpiola 2011:35)

4.3. The new media environment and digital publicity

The environment of media has dramatically changed after the advancements in Internet technologies and smartphones and after the emergence of social media and user-generated content. Thus, crisis communication is also taking place in a new environment that is constantly active and has multiple channels of communication. Crisis communications and crisis managers alike are affected by these changes, that require new strategies and ways of communication. Some of the changes in the media environment that affect crisis communication will be discussed next.

A major change that affects crisis communication is the interplay of different channels of communication, audiences and content. Clear boundaries between these different agents do not exist anymore, and traditional roles between the sender of a message and the recipient have changed. This has been largely affected by the participation of the public in creating, sharing and editing content, and thus attracting new audiences and networks. The public and the stakeholders of organisations are not merely the recipient of information anymore but also the providers. Thus, controlling communication surrounding a crisis by the dissemination of information through traditional news outlets, for instance, has become almost impossible. This also demonstrates the constant presence of media, enabled by new media applications, the Internet and smartphones. The constant presence of media is also a result of a new communication culture created by

social media and the expansion of public discussion to online platforms. (Korpiola 2011: 14-18)

These changes are not only happening in one country, but in many. The global media environment is changing too, and local crises have the potential to become global crises. In the new media environment, news about crises can circulate instantly across borders and languages by complex networks between different agents. Furthermore, the participation of citizens has increased in crises, as they are often providing up-to-date information by sharing photos or videos from site, or by reporting what is happening for example, through different social media. (Korpiola 2011: 17-18) Another prominent factor of the new media environment is the emergence of digital publicity.

The concept of digital publicity refers to the public arena created by the combination of social media, search engines, mainstream media and new media application, where different agents, communities and networks meet. In digital publicity, messages get distributed fast and everywhere at once. Content is being circulated from one medium to another, and as this happens, the narrative of the events may change, as well as the original meaning and context. This process of circulation leads to media event, in which the news that have been circulated by different agents become the center of digital publicity. Identifying different agents and communities that meet in digital publicity can be challenging, as communities are often scattered and thus they do not create a clear, single community. Communities and agents in digital publicity can be described more as a network of different agents, that creates the narrative. (Korpiola 2011: 18-21)

For crisis communication, digital publicity creates many challenges. As digital publicity is constant, whether it is day or night, it creates challenges for crisis communication to be ready and react quickly to crises, especially in the crisis response stage. Also, as content becomes circulated through various media and agents, the messages used in crisis communication may lose their meaning and original context, or even change. It can be difficult for organisations to anticipate the logic behind digital publicity, as new media applications and social media applications are developed constantly and some previously used applications disappear. (Korpiola 2011: 18-21)

When crises erupt, people do not need to look far for information. In the new media environment, news reach people through different networks, such as Facebook and smartphone applications, and shortens the time crisis communicators have to react to a crisis. Hence, it is important for organisations to familiarize themselves with different networks and agents that are active in social media and also anticipate where narratives about a crisis will be created and shared. (Korpiola 2011: 16)

4.4. Social media in crisis communication

The constant presence of social media and the fast pace of sharing information it allows has made it an integral part of crisis communication, and thus, part of crisis management. Studies suggest that the use of social media increases when crises occur, and that in fact, the information provided about crises in conventional mass media is seen less trustworthy than the information provided in social media. It also provides a platform for emotional support, allowing people to share information, offer support and help and come together in the time of crisis. (Jin, Liu & Austin 2014: 76). The fast speed of sharing information in social media and the high activity of the public in social media in time of crises creates new challenges for crisis communication managers but also opportunities. Thus, it is extremely important for an organisation take part in social media as a strategy of crisis communication.

The use of social media in crisis communication creates new opportunities for organisations to interact with citizen as well as handle crisis situations. Nowadays, citizens are active participants of crisis communication due to the increased use of social media and thus it is crucial for organisations to be active in social media too. Social media provides a platform for organisations to build relationships and trust between them and the public. (Watson & Hagen 2015: 143)

4.4.1. Theories on social media crisis communication

Only a few theories on social media crisis communication exist, yet research on the effects of social media in crisis communication is growing fast. Theories such as the net-

worked crisis communication theory (NCC) and the social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) are challenging traditional crisis communication theories by focusing on the role of social media. The four-channel model of communication too focuses on the active participation of the public in the crisis communication process through social networking.

Traditional views on crisis communication describe the crisis communication process as a one-way form of communication with the assumption the receiver has a passive role in the process. The four-channel model of communication, however, emphasizes the role of the public as active participants in the communication process through social networking, which has been increased by the developments of Internet based services and smart phones. This model of communication focuses on emergency communication and communications during crises. The four-channel model of communication presents a dynamic and multi-directional process of communication between the public, media and agencies. The public is in the centre of the model, as they are both the receivers of information but also the providers of real-time information. Social media allows a faster and richer flow of information that is not only for the other members of the public but also for the media and different agencies, such as the organisation facing a crisis. (Seeger & Sellnow 2013: 127-131)

The networked crisis communication theory (NCC) challenges traditional crisis communication theories by suggesting that the medium used in crisis communication has an effect on the outcome of crisis communication. The theory suggests that crisis messages through traditional media and through social media can have different impacts and thus lead to different responses by the public. (Liu & Fraustino 2014: 545) Studies have shown that crisis communication through social media, for example Facebook and Twitter, leads to higher reputation than crisis communication through traditional media, such as newspapers. Organisations that use social media for crisis communication can also be considered to be more open to have a dialog with their stakeholders and to want to communicate with their stakeholders directly and fast. Also, it is suggested that the medium has a stronger effect on the impact of crisis communication than the type of crisis, whether it is internal or external. (Utz, Schultz & Glocka 2012: 40)

The social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC) is based on rumour psychology theory and on Coomb's (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory. SMCC aims at describing how organisations can best use social media when communicating with the public during crises. (Liu & Fraustino 2014: 545) The SMMC also focuses on explaining how the public shares, consumes and produces information about crises in social media, and thus helps organisations to use this knowledge in their crisis communication strategies. The theory identifies different publics using social media channels and five different factors that are influential social media creators, social media followers and social media inactives. Acknowledging these different types of social media user types may lead to more efficient crisis communication (Jin et al. 2014: 77)

These different theories showcase some of the new research areas around crisis communication and the need to develop new theories that integrate social media. There is no dominant theory around social media crisis communication, yet more and more research is done in the field of crisis communication. Crisis communication is changing rapidly due to the participation of the public via social media and the advancements in technology. New theories on crisis communication take into consideration the active participation of the public and the need for a dialog between organisations and the public.

4.4.2. Opportunities and challenges

Social media affects crisis communication theory and practice, and forces many organisations to include the use of online communication in their crisis communication. This subchapter will discuss how social media can be integrated into crisis communication during the three stages of crisis, outlined in chapter two.

In the pre-crisis stage, when a crisis has not yet occurred, organisations can use social media as a way of connecting with the public. By actively communicating with the public and sharing information of potential risks for instance, organisations can build a relationship with the public that may then help communications during a crisis. If an organisation creates a presence in social media and builds networks through two-way com-

munication, it can be more easily identified as a trustworthy actor during a crisis. Pre-crisis communication through social media can also improve the public's crisis preparedness by making the public aware of risks as well as how to act in case of a crisis. (Watson & Hagen 2015: 143-144)

Another benefit of social media during the pre-crisis stage is that it helps organisations to detect warning signs that could lead to a crisis. By scanning social media and familiarizing oneself with social media, and more importantly with how an organisation's stakeholders use social media, crisis manager have an opportunity to prepare to or even prevent a potential crisis from happening. As discussed in chapter two, social media may create paracrises, which can act as warning signs of a larger issue that could result in a crisis. Being alert of paracrises on social media and handling them appropriately can save crisis managers from dealing with a crisis later on. (Coombs 2015a: 26)

In the crisis response stage, the use of social media can be extremely important, both for an organisation's sake as well as the citizens'. An organisation providing information during a crisis has changed into public providing information too, often at a faster pace, which has led to the public being an important part of crisis communication. Through social media, citizens can now post and share information, photos, videos and location details during a crisis and thus increase situational awareness among citizens as well as organisations and authorities, for example. Information provided from the scene, for instance, can be lifesaving and significantly help the management of a crisis. (Watson & Hagen 2015: 144-145) Hence, it is important that the organisation has the tools to use the information available in social media and integrate it to its crisis management and communication not forgetting traditional media.

After a crisis has occurred, organisations can use social media to inform the public about possible procedures taken after the crisis as well as to provide them with reassurance that the crisis has passed. After the crisis, it is important for organisations to maintain relationships with the public and promote a sense of community. (Watson & Hagen 2015: 146) Social media can be used to answer stakeholders questions after the crisis

and provide updates if necessary. Social media can function as a platform for people to discuss the event as well as to provide support.

Even though the use of social media provides new opportunities and channels for organisations to reach the public, the challenges of using social media should be taken into consideration too. Several threats exist when using social media in crisis communication, affecting both organisations and the public. In this paper, the focus will be on the challenges that organisation may face due to the use of social media in crisis communication.

One of the major challenges of social media is the large amount of information. In crisis communication, different communication channels need to be taken into consideration and controlling many different channels during a crisis can be difficult. Another issue is the loss of control, meaning that organisations are not the only providers of information about a crisis anymore. The activity of citizens in social media during a crisis means that information can be shared instantly without the organisation being part of it. Organisations cannot control the information flow of social media that comes from the public, nor what is written about the organisation itself. (Wendling et al. 2013: 26-27)

This also leads to the problem of sharing false information. Information can be shared quickly in social media and incorrect information is very hard to retract and organisation may have to spend time on correcting false claims. The dissemination or sharing of misinformation can cause damage to organisations reputation and even put citizens at risk. The challenge with social media is that those publishing information may not follow the ethical and responsible rules of journalism, and the authenticity of information is not checked or often even questioned. (Wendling et al. 2013: 27)

Due to the speed of sharing information on social media and the public's high activity in social media during a crisis, organisations often lose the chance of being the first ones to address the situation. Coombs (2007a) notes that one of the main guidelines regarding crisis response is that organisations should be fast to give a comment about a crisis. Studies have shown that being the first to inform about a crisis, as opposed to media be-

ing the first one to expose it for example, increases the credibility of an organisation (Arpan & Roskos-Ewoldsen 2005: 425).

Transparency of organisations and of information in general is in high demand, but it often creates a problem regarding confidentiality and privacy. Both the privacy of individuals and any confidential information of organisations are at risk. Organisations need to take into consideration the privacy of their stakeholders as well as the privacy of social media users when communicating in social media. (Wendling et al. 2013: 29)

Coombs (2015a: 27) adds that social media can make preventive actions visible to the public, thus blurring the line between the pre-crisis stage and crisis response. When an organisation tries to prevent a paracrises from escalating to a crisis, the procedures, normally invisible to the public, are now visible in social media and can be interpreted as crisis response procedures. By doing this, paracrises may gain more visibility and lead to further paracrises.

4.4.3. Best practices

The term best practice refers to a set of procedures that have been found effective, and they can be used in different contexts. Next, relevant to the topic of this thesis, the best practices concerning crisis communication and the use of social media will be discussed.

Creating crisis management policies, which involve the use of social media as part of crisis communication is crucial for effective communication in decision-making. Having policies, which outline the strategies and objectives of the use of social media, can minimize the risks of poor communication in a crisis as well as mistakes. These policies can be used to increase public preparedness and create connections with the public for instance. (Veil, Buehner & Palenchar 2011: 112-113)

Planning ahead is an important task in crisis management and in crisis communication. It is important to have a plan in place about which channels to use in a crisis and who

uses them. Informing internal stakeholders, such as employees, and external stakeholders, such as customers, usually requires different channels and platforms. Wikis for instance, are good platforms when communicating with employees. In a crisis, wikis are fast to use and can be edited by others. During the planning stage, organisations can also monitor social media behavior to detect possible risks as well as the public's perception of them. (Veil et al. 2011: 113)

Creating a relationship with the public is important for organisations, and can be especially beneficial if the organisation faces a crisis. The public is entitled to information about a crisis, which organisations can provide and should do so in quickly and accurately. However, with the use of social media and the possibility of two-way communication, the public can also provide the organisations with critical information. Providing information fast may also reduce uncertainty. By building a relationship with the public, communication about a crisis can help both the organisation and the public to handle the crisis. (Veil et al. 2011: 114)

Listening to the public and knowing your audience is important in connecting with the public. Social media provide a platform for discussion and sharing between an organisation and the public. Listening to the public plays an important part in monitoring potential risks and allows the organisation to react to rumors or false information for example, before they spread. Social media also allows, or even requires, a more personal approach to communication compared to traditional media. Using social media in crisis communication allows a more personal discussion between the public and an organisation which can affect the public's perception of the organisation and the crisis. (Veil et al. 2011: 114)

Being open and honest when communicating with the public can increase its trust in an organisation. Transparency and honesty are important aspects of crisis communication, as the public will look for other sources via social media if their needs are not satisfied. How an organisation communicates about a crisis will also impact the public's perceptions of the organisation and of its image. By using social media and reacting to a crisis, an organisation shows that it has nothing to hide. Through social media, organisations

can send status messages for instance and by doing that show the public that they are on top of the situation. The lack of information from an organisation may cause distrust and make the public rely on other sources of information. (Veil et al. 2011:115)

Collaborating with other trustworthy sources can also increase the credibility of an organisation. Accuracy is important in crisis communication, as the dissemination of incorrect information can negatively affect an organisations reputation. Creating a network in social media with other trustworthy organisations can improve the effectiveness of crisis communication. Coordinating with other sources can lead to more consistent messages and communication as well as enhance the credibility of an organisation and the information they provide. (Veil et al. 2011: 115)

Being accessible and answering to the needs of the media requires efforts from an organisation in handling multiple channels. Even though the importance of using social media in crisis communication is highly discussed, traditional media, such as TV and newspapers, is still the primary source of information for many. Thus, organisations should exercise crisis communication both in traditional media and in social media. However, because of the popularity of social media and widespread use of the Internet, many media outlets have expanded their online operations. Occasionally even traditional media outlets incorporate social media sources in crisis reporting. Thus, social media use by organisations does not always take away from traditional media. Accessibility in a crisis is important for organisations, in order to provide information to large audiences in a timely manner. (Veil et al. 2011: 116)

Expressing empathy, compassion and concern is a major factor in crisis communication. Social media provides a suitable environment for this due to its personal and social characteristics. Through social media, the public can directly discuss with representatives of an organisation and the representatives can use more informal language and express their concerns or sympathy more directly. When communicating with the public via social media, the organisation can represent itself without the filtration of the press for instance. Social media is a platform for connecting, networking and sharing, and

thus it gives organisations the opportunity to express empathy and concern too. (Veil et al. 2011: 116)

Acknowledging uncertainties surrounding crises and adjusting communications accordingly can minimize the risk of providing false information. Organisations are expected to provide information about crises quickly, yet commenting on crises can be difficult because of their uncertain and even chaotic nature. Giving out false information about a crisis, for instance of its severity, can diminish the public's trust in an organisation. Also, not providing enough information can lead to the public looking for information from somewhere else, and also questioning the organisation's credibility. Many social media applications, however, allow sending short messages instantly to wide audiences. Organisations can use social media applications, such as Twitter, to send short messages to update, correct or add more information and those messages can be frequent. The messages may not give a big picture on the events but they show that the organisation is actively monitoring the situation. (Veil et al. 2011: 117)

Promoting self-efficacy through messages can help the public to feel a sense of control in a crisis situation. Messages of self-efficacy can be recommendations, for instance, to help others or how to avoid further risks. Research shows that in crisis situations, individuals have the urge to help and contribute. Hence, by providing messages of encouragement, the public may cope better with the situation. Organisations can use social media to collect donations or to help in finding missing people for example. (Veil et al. 2011: 117)

Taking cultural differences into consideration when using social media in crisis communication is often necessary, as social media is fragmented concerning users and interest. Different social media platforms attract different groups of people and provide different reasons for usage. Knowing your audience as well as having a plan about what is wanted to be conveyed to whom are factors that organisations should consider when using social media. (Veil et al. 2011: 117)

These best practices give an indication of how social media can be used in crisis communication by organisations. Incorporating social media into crisis communication allows new ways to communicate with the public. However, policies and plans should be put in place before a crisis to increase its effectiveness when a crisis occurs. Social media is a new channel of communication between organisations and the public, but it does not substitute traditional media.

5. CASE STUDY: THE USE OF TWITTER IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION

The empirical part of this study concentrates on a content analysis of how Lufthansa and Germanwings used social media, in this case Twitter, in their crisis communication after one of their aircrafts crashed in March 2015. As described earlier in this paper, the data analysis will be conducted by using qualitative methods. The objective of the analysis is to examine and describe the airlines' joint social media strategies, focusing on their Twitter use. Conclusions will be drawn in the end of the chapter.

5.1. Introducing the case and data analysis

Germanwings is a subsidiary airline of Lufthansa, a German airline, offering low-cost flights. On the 24th of March 2015, a Germanwings flight 4U9525 flying from Barcelona, Spain to Dusseldorf, Germany crashed in the French Alps. All 144 passengers and six crewmembers were killed in the crash. As the investigation of the crash progressed, it was revealed that the plane was deliberately crashed by the co-pilot. The co-pilot was found to have been treated for depression in the past and having hidden sick notes from his employer. (Knight 2015) The crisis involved stakeholders from several different countries, as the passenger had different nationalities. In addition, the crash was investigated by both France and Germany as the plane crashed on French soil. Thus, the crisis was not local, but international, affecting authorities and stakeholders from different countries.

Germanwings and its parent company Lufthansa came under media scrutiny after it was revealed the plane was deliberately crashed by the co-pilot who had been suffering from depression. Not only did the crash itself impose a threat to the airlines' reputation, but also the speculations about the airlines' safety procedures threatened the organization's image. The media started to question the effectiveness of Lufthansa's procedures concerning the monitoring of the health of their crew, after speculations that Lufthansa was aware of the co-pilot's medical condition. (See The Guardian 2015) Even though the crash happened on a flight operated by Germanwings, Lufthansa as its parent company was heavily affected by the crisis and had to also take part in the crisis communication process.

The crash and the crisis it caused can be identified as a man-made crisis. It can also be distinguished as an organizational crisis, as it affected the airlines' operations, reputation and led to financial losses. Furthermore, it caused harm and emotional distress to its stakeholders. The crisis was a sudden event, which caused uncertainty in many ways. Also, the events led to many airlines rethinking their policies concerning their cockpit safety and thus the crisis did not only affect one airline, but the whole industry. It also affected governmental officials in different countries, as the passengers on the flight came from different countries.

The data for the analysis of the airlines' use of social media in their crisis communication was collected from the official Twitter accounts of Germanwings and Lufthansa. Lufthansa has different Twitter accounts for different languages and for the case study their English Twitter account was used. The data collected included the airlines' posts on Twitter related to the crash and its aftermath. tweets regarding the crash and consequently those used for the analysis were posted between the 24th of March 2015 and 19th of May 2015. In order to demonstrate the use of Twitter and the style of the posts, screenshots were taken of relevant posts and will be presented in this chapter.

Qualitative content analysis was used in analyzing the research data for the case study. As the name suggests, content analysis is a qualitative research method which aims to describe different phenomena. This can be achieved by creating categories or concepts from data related to a specific research phenomenon. Qualitative content analysis was chosen as it allows the analysis and interpretation of data. (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen & Kynnäs 2014:1) Germanwings' and Lufthansa's tweets were analyzed together as their communication strategies in social media were the same and their crisis communication cooperated.

Most of the messages concerning the incident were posted within a week of the crash, followed by a few messages posted a month or two after. Germanwings posted 82 messages about the crash on Twitter, of which 33 were written in English. Lufthansa also posted 33 messages about the crash on their English Twitter account. In total, 66 Twitter messages were analysed in addition to a few Facebook messages posted by Lufthansa.

5.2. Twitter analysis

In August 2015, Lufthansa had 199,000 followers on Twitter whereas Germanwings had 71,000 followers. Lufthansa used English throughout their communication about the crisis, as they have separate Twitter accounts for different languages. Germanwings on the other hand, used German and English initially, followed by Spanish translation about seven hours after the first tweet about the crash. After that, most of the tweets concerning the incident were translated in all three languages on Germanwings' Twitter account. Lufthansa and Germanwings both used Twitter to communicate during the crisis, posted similar updates and retweeted each other's messages. The airlines' crisis communication in Twitter was co-operated and their Tweets followed the same pattern. Thus, Germanwings and Lufthansa seemed to have similar communication strategies concerning social media. The only notable difference between their use of social media was that Lufthansa used Facebook actively in providing more information whereas Germanwings used their website for the same purpose.

As the crash did not expose the general public to danger, the communication on Twitter concentrated more on updates and providing information of what had happened, rather than warnings and instructions for instance. The information provided can be seen as operational reputation oriented information as discussed on page twenty-six. The airlines crisis communication in Twitter was more sender-oriented than receiver-oriented and focused on reputation repair. However, they also addressed the families of the victims and provided information for those affected by the incident.

To identify the stages of crisis communication during which the posts took place, the three-stage model can be used due to its simplicity and applicability. Also, the functions of crisis communication represented in figure 5 can be applied to the tweets examined. The pre-crisis stage refers to the time before a crisis has erupted and the function of crisis communication during that stage involves building relationships and collecting information. Both the airlines were active in Twitter and in communicating with their customers before the crisis, which can be seen as environmental scanning and creating relationships, as defined by Seeger and Sellnow (2013:14).

Most of the communication can be considered to have happened during the crisis response stage, where the function of crisis communication is to manage crises. This stage consists of the initial response to the crisis and reputation repair. The airlines were most active in Twitter during the initial response and more specifically during the first few days of the crisis by updating and giving information about what had happened. Also, addressing the families of the victims can be identified as a reputation repair strategy. The airlines attempted to manage the crisis by providing accurate and up-to-date information through their Twitter account.

The functions of crisis communication during the post-crisis stage include repairing and maintaining relationships as discussed in chapter three. According to Coombs' definition of the post-crisis stage an organisation may still communicate with different stakeholders and the media about the crisis. Thus, the airlines' last posts about the crisis thanking for the support and notifying about the memorial service can be seen as post-crisis stage communication and as a way of repairing relationships. This stage also allows communication to be used for organisational learning and having stronger relationships, however, this did not come across from the tweets posted during this stage as it is often an executed internally.

The messages posted by Germanwings and Lufthansa were grouped together as they follow a same pattern and have the same communicative functions. The tweets were then divided into five different categories based on their functions. Dividing data into categories is characteristic to content analysis as it helps describing the research phenomenon in question. The analysis does not follow any specific crisis communication model or theory so the categorization has been done considering the functions social media has in crisis communication in this specific case. The tweets were categorized by finding similarities and conformities between them and at the same time considering their functions.

The first category consists of messages posted in the first hours after speculations of the crash came alight, thus constituting as the initial response. The function of the posts in

this category is to react to and manage the crisis through communication. The second category consists of messages that provide information about what the airlines were doing after the crash and can be considered as reputation repair. The third category concentrates on messages that referred to other social media or websites, which is a distinctive function of social media. The fourth category examines messages that address the victims and express empathy. The last category consists of the last messages posted by the airlines' that related to the crisis. The posts in this category represent the ending of their crisis communication and how they decided to communicate it. The purpose of categorizing the tweets is to make the analysis of the tweets clearer as well as to help describing the different uses of social media in crisis communication. However, the categories are not strict, as many of the tweets serve different purposes and could fall under different categories.

5.2.1. Initial response

Germanwings' first Twitter messages about the crash were published on the 24th of August at 11.52 in the morning. The first tweets were posted in German and consisted of three consecutive messages. Soon after, the same posts were tweeted in English. Figure 1 shows the first messages posted in English on Germanwings' Twitter account, and as can be seen, Germanwings does not yet confirm that there has been an accident, but they are addressing speculations about one. Germanwings also promises to inform the media when they have more information and guides Twitter users to Germanwings' official website for updates.



Figure 8. First tweets (Germanwings 2015)

Germanwings uses Twitter to indicate that they are aware of the speculation but they do not speculate or provide unconfirmed facts. Providing false information could lead to

reputational damage for the organisation and due to the use of social media, false information could spread quickly. Instead of confirming anything yet, they try to position themselves as the source of information and indicate that they are looking into the speculated events.

Soon after the first messages posted by Germanwings, Lufthansa issued a statement on its Twitter account. The first messages Lufthansa posted on its Twitter account about the crash were indicated to be statements made by the CEO of Lufthansa, Carsten Spohr. Though he does not confirm anything, he addresses the families and friends of those on board and expresses concern about a possible accident. For the screenshot taken of the first two messages posted by Lufthansa regarding the crash, see appendix 1. The two messages were both retweeted, or shared, more than 4,700 times, making them the most retweeted messages that discussed the crash. Germanwings, too, retweeted the two messages.

According to a preliminary report made by the French Civil Aviation Safety Investigation Authority, the plane collided at 9.41 in the morning (BEA 2015:5). However, this was not known on the day of the crash as it was only confirmed during the investigation that followed. As can be seen from figure 1, the first tweet was posted at 11.52 in the morning, two hours after the crash had happened. The media had, however, published reports about the crash before Lufthansa or Germanwings addressed it in social media. Nonetheless, Germanwings and Lufthansa can be considered to have reacted to the speculations fairly fast, even though confirmation of the crash in English came out later. Many of the comments left by Twitter users on the first tweets were criticizing Germanwings and Lufthansa for indicating in their tweets that they have no knowledge of what has actually happened.



Germanwings ✓

@germanwings

Follow

We must confirm to our deepest regret that Germanwings Flight 4U 9525 from Barcelona to Düsseldorf has suffered an accident over the 1/5

4:55 PM - 24 Mar 2015

578 256



Germanwings ✓

@germanwings

Follow

French Alps. The flight was being operated with an Airbus A320 aircraft, and was carrying 144 passengers and six crew members. 2/5

4:56 PM - 24 Mar 2015

436 182



Germanwings ✓

@germanwings

Follow

Lufthansa and Germanwings have established a telephone hotline. The toll-free 0800 11 33 55 77 number is available to all the families 3/5

4:56 PM - 24 Mar 2015

420 192



Figure 9. Confirmation (Germanwings 2015)

At 1.27 in the afternoon, Germanwings confirmed the plane had crashed, however, the posts were written in German. Lufthansa confirmed there had been an accident at 1.38 in the afternoon on their English Twitter account whereas Germanwings confirmed the crash in English at 4.55 in the afternoon, more than three hours after the confirmation in German. The messages confirming the crash were the same both on Lufthansa's Twitter account and on Germanwings' Twitter account, further emphasizing cooperated crisis communication between the two airlines.

The confirmation consisted of five messages including information about the flight as well as about emergency services for the families. Germanwings and Lufthansa also expressed sympathy towards the friends and families of the victims. The line of five posts

was one of the longest posts posted by the airlines when communicating about the crisis. As the posts on Twitter can only be 140 characters long, the airlines used numbers on their tweets to indicate which tweets belonged together in order to create longer messages. This can be seen from figure 8.

5.2.2. Procedures taken by the airlines after the crash

The second category of tweets included messages that indicated what the airlines were doing after the crash. These tweets aimed at conveying what the airlines were doing to help the families of the victims, as well as how they were reacting to it as an organisation. Figure 9 serves an example of these tweets.



Figure 10. An update by Lufthansa (Lufthansa 2015)

Apart from the initial messages posted by Germanwings that gave more information about the accident and consisted of several separate tweets, many of the more informative posts were shorter, and thus more in the style of Twitter messaging. This can also be seen in in the previous figure.

Germanwings and Lufthansa used Twitter to provide information for those affected by the incident, such as friends and family, but they also used Twitter to provide information for the public. The information provided was often very specific, for example,

when giving information about the flights arranged for the families (see appendix 2). As the next example demonstrates the airlines also used Twitter to communicate what they were doing to ensure a similar incident would not happen again, hence indicating that they are already learning from the crisis.

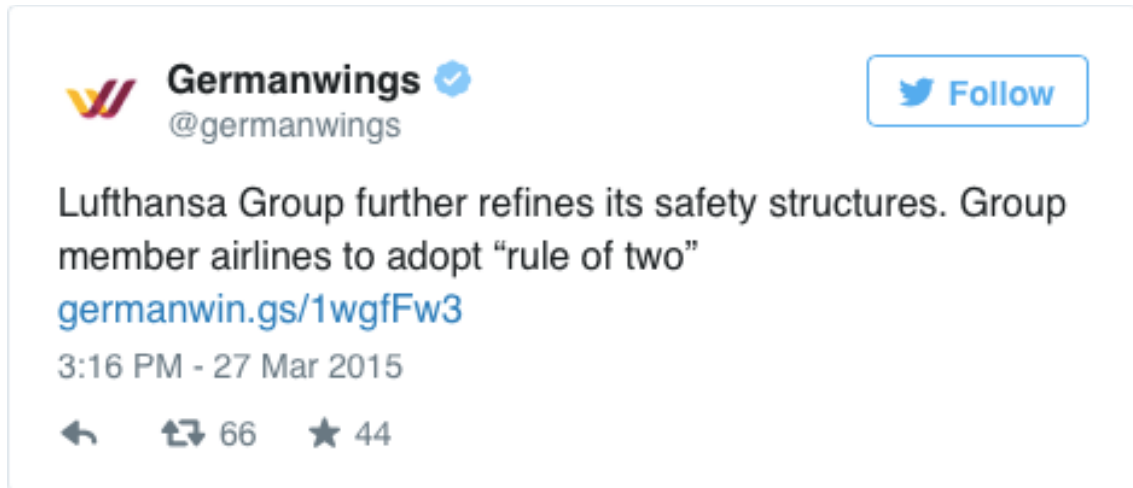


Figure 11. Message by Germanwings (Germanwings 2015)

In general, Germanwings and Lufthansa did not provide much information about the accident itself or what had led to it in their tweets and mostly concentrated on providing practical information for friends and families of the victims, especially during the first day of the crisis. In addition to tweets explaining what the airlines were doing to deal with the crisis, Twitter was used to comment on the investigation of the crash, as the example in figure 11 shows. The message can also be seen as a slightly defensive reaction, as it is addressing accusations that the airlines knew about the co-pilot's health issues.



Figure 12. Commenting on investigation (Germanwings 2015)

Common to Twitter, when messages are short and often referred to something, the information provided in the example above on its own may not make sense without any previous information about the incident or without following the link. This further emphasizes how Twitter is often used as a link to other sources, and that it is practical for short updates and statements, rather than in-depth information.

Instead of using Twitter to provide detailed information about the incident itself, Germanwings and Lufthansa focused on expressing emotions and sympathy throughout their communication. The next two subchapters will focus on tweets that lead or referred to other social media or websites and on tweets that were used to express emotions and empathy.

5.2.3. References to other social media

In a lot of their tweets, Germanwings included a link to their official website for further information. The restricted length of posts on Twitter does not allow providing detailed information and thus it often works as more of a gateway to other social media or websites. By referring to their own website, as in the example in figure 12, the tweet does not provide information on its own.



Figure 13. Daily summary (Germanwings 2015)

Both Lufthansa and Germanwings tweeted links to YouTube videos that featured the CEO's of Lufthansa and Germanwings. Lufthansa was the first one to post a video link, see appendix 3, where the CEO of Lufthansa addresses the customers of Lufthansa and Germanwings, and those affected by the crisis. Germanwings on the other hand, posted the tweet both in German and English, and respectively included a link to both English and German YouTube videos. Figure 13 provides an example of a YouTube video linked to a Germanwings' tweet.



Figure 14. A link to a YouTube video featuring the CEO of Lufthansa (Germanwings 2015)

In comparison to Germanwings, Lufthansa used other social media more actively than Germanwings. In addition to using Twitter, YouTube and websites, Lufthansa used Facebook in their crisis communication. However, as this thesis studies how Lufthansa and Germanwings used Twitter as a crisis communication tool, detailed analysis of Lufthansa's Facebook usage will not be given. In many of its tweets, similar to Germanwings usage of their website, Lufthansa included a link to its Facebook account for

more detailed information or longer statements. An example of a Facebook post linked to Lufthansa's Twitter post will be given on page 68.



Figure 15. Link to Facebook (Lufthansa 2015)

The link to Lufthansa's Facebook account can be seen in the figure above. In addition to the link, the example demonstrates how Lufthansa used hashtags in its tweets. Lufthansa has used both hashtag #4U9525, referring to the flight number, and hashtag #indeepsorrow. The hashtags categorises tweets by their topic and can thus be more easily found later. Lufthansa uses the hashtag #indeepsorrow more actively than Germanwings, to tag it with other tweets regarding the crash.

These examples show how different social media are intertwined and how they can be used together to reach wider audiences. Using different social media applications can reach different groups of users and also allow a broader view of the event. For example, Twitter is different from many other social media applications due to the shortness of messages and thus may work better in the initial stages of a crisis where information needs to be delivered and shared fast. Facebook on the other hand can be used to reach groups and have discussions, which can help to get support and share feelings.

5.2.4. Sympathizing

Expressing concern and empathy are important in successful crisis communication, as noted before in this thesis. Social media does not only allow the public to express their feelings and support but it also allows organisations to express empathy. Social media creates a platform for direct discussion and for the organisation to express themselves too. Many of the tweets posted by Germanwings and Lufthansa expressed sadness, empathy and/or concern. Some of the tweets focused only on expressing empathy and concern, and more informative tweets were also used to express empathy.



Figure 16. A tweet by the CEO of Germanwings (Germanwings 2015)

Germanwings' and Lufthansa's tweets focused heavily on expressing their feelings about the crash as well as on expressing their sympathies to those affected by the crash. As figure 15 and 16 demonstrate, Germanwings often emphasized their support for the families and friends of the victims, and also that they were concentrating on supporting and helping them. The statements in the examples tweets were made by the CEO of Germanwings, Thomas Winkelmann, which was indicated in the tweet by writing his name in the end of the message.

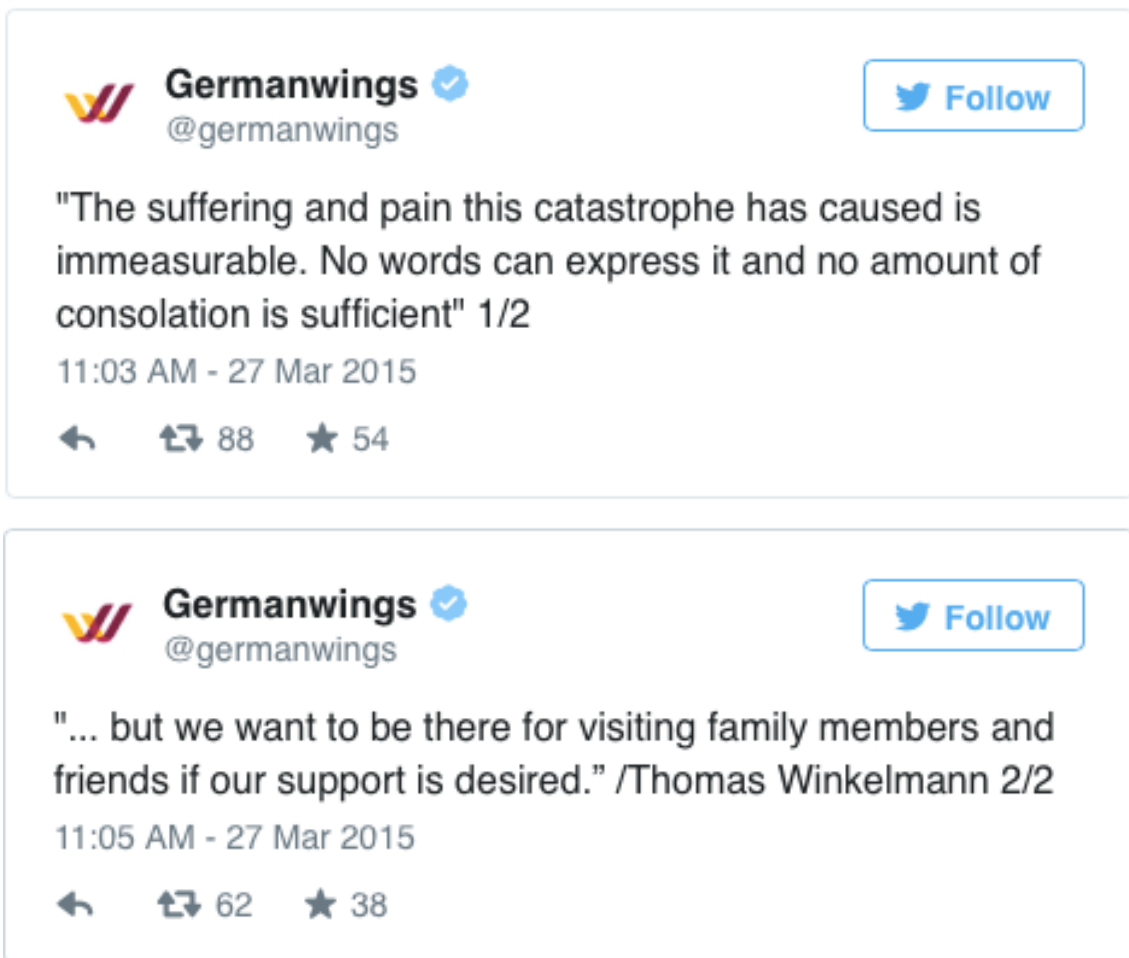


Figure 17. Expressing emotions (Germanwings 2015)

In addition to statements that conveyed empathy and concern, Germanwings used other ways to show their grief. On the first day of the crisis, Germanwings changed its normally orange and yellow logo in Twitter into black and grey. They also retweeted a post by Lufthansa which stated that their employee magazine is printed in black in honor of the victims.



Figure 18. We are in mourning (Germanwings 2015)

The above example shows a tweet that was posted four days after the crash, and it was posted at the same time as a minute of silence was held on the 25th of March. The text is again translated in German, Spanish and English and the flight number is used as reference of the crash along with the date of the crash. The figure also shows how the tweet features the hashtag #indeepsorrow, again tagging it with other posts that feature the same hashtag and thus making it visible for those following the #indeepsorrow hashtag.

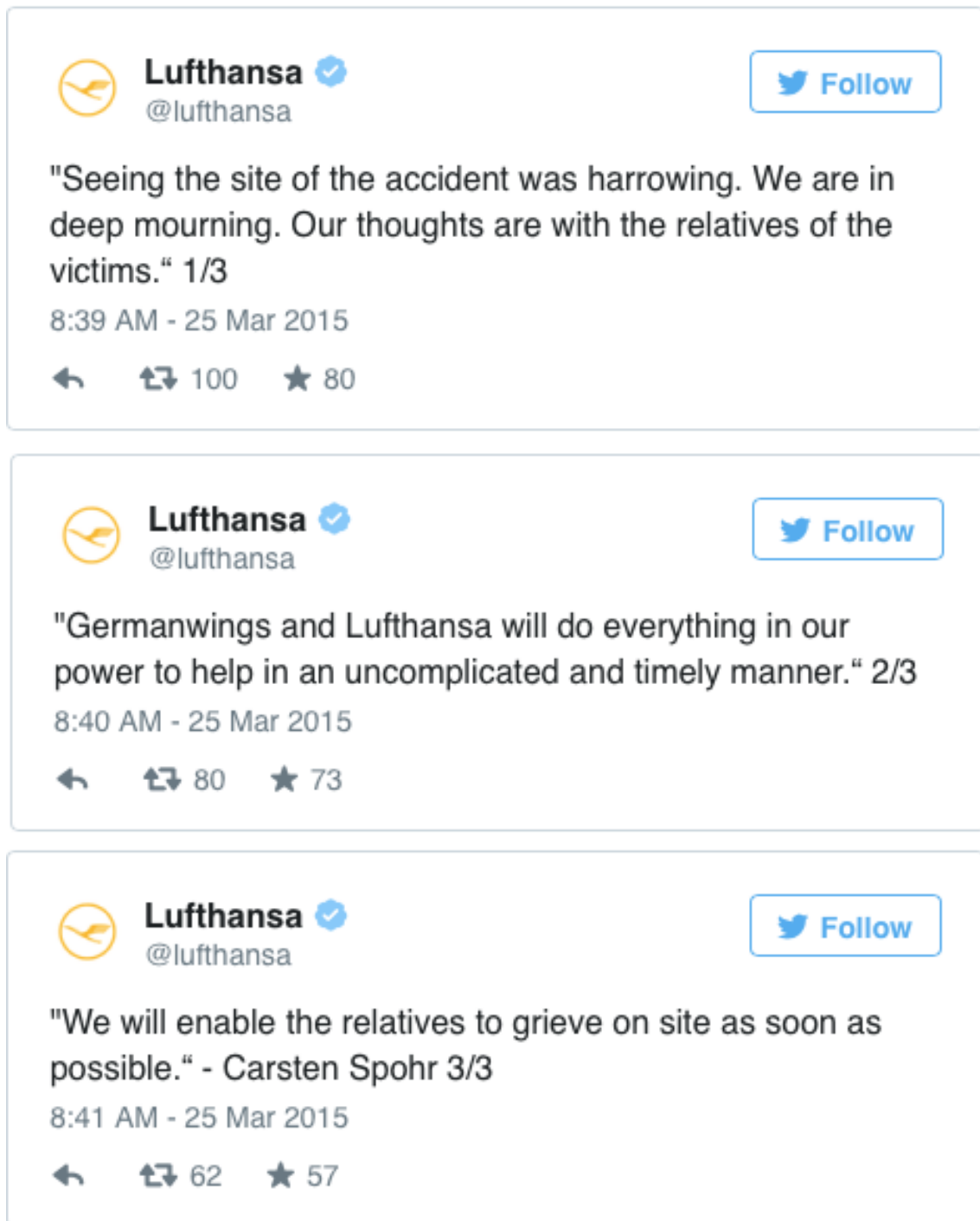


Figure 19. A tweet by the CEO of Lufthansa (Lufthansa 2015)

Lufthansa posted similar messages to Germanwings, where they addressed the victims' families and friends, and offered their support. The example of three messages in figure 18, demonstrate this. Many of Lufthansa's tweets were statements made by the CEO of

Lufthansa, such as the tweets above. The tweets give an expression of the CEO being actively involved in resolving the crisis, but even more so he expressed his desire to help the victims' families and his own emotions about the crash. Both Germanwings and Lufthansa used tweets to address the victims families and expressed that their main focus is to support them.

5.2.5. Final note

Lufthansa and Germanwings posted some of their last messages on Twitter in April, concentrating on giving thanks and providing information about a memorial service. The following figure is an example of a tweet including information about a memorial service for the victims. Germanwings posted the same message on its Twitter account the same day.

Two months after the crash, Lufthansa tweeted its last message about the crash linking it to their Facebook page, as can be seen from figure 19.



Figure 20. Final tweet (Lufthansa 2015)

The following figure of a Facebook post was the last message about the crash, including the Twitter post above.

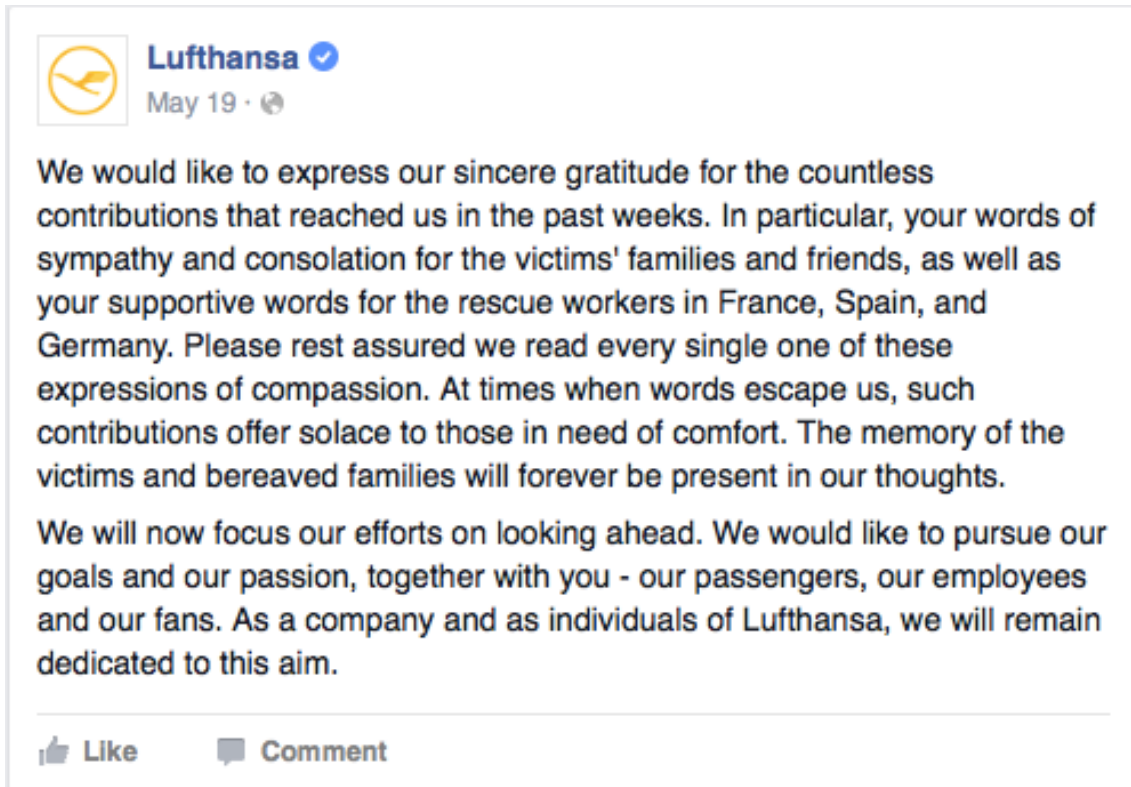


Figure 21. Facebook message signifying end of crisis communication (Lufthansa 2015)

Through this Facebook post, Lufthansa clearly indicated its efforts to move on from a crisis and its efforts to conclude messaging about the crisis. This was conveyed by the post on Twitter that referred to their “further social media activities” and the message that followed on Facebook thanking well-wishers.

5.3. Conclusions

The content analysis focused on how Lufthansa and Germanwings used their Twitter accounts as part of their crisis communication, after they faced a crisis when one of their planes crashed, killing everyone on board. The analysis did not examine the airlines’ usage of other channels of communication, such as traditional media, nor did it focus on the usage of other social media. Also, the analysis was based on tweets and posts written in English and thus the airlines’ communication in other languages requires an analysis of its own.

Both Lufthansa and Germanwings were active on Twitter before the crisis erupted, communicating with customers, advertising and giving updates on flights for instance. During the crisis, normal communication was stopped and their tweets were only related to the crash. Germanwings posted its last tweet related to the crash on the 17th of April whereas Lufthansa posted its last tweet on the 19th of May 2015, about two months after the crash. After stopping communication about the crisis, both the airlines continued communication on Twitter as normal.

The airline's crisis communication on Twitter concentrated on providing information to the public as well as the stakeholders, such as the families and friends of the victims. Some of their tweets can also be seen to be directed to their customer. The tweets included information about help lines, press conferences and what the company was doing to help those affected by the crisis. In addition, the airlines' communication via Twitter concentrated on addressing the victims' families and friends. Addressing the stakeholders is an important step of the crisis response stage and it can help in saving an organizations reputation, as discussed in chapter two. Twitter was also used to provide short updates on the crash, as characteristic to the microblog, and to forward messages from the CEO's of the airlines. Twitter was also used to direct readers to other channels, such as the airline's websites, where more information was available. Other social media applications, namely Facebook and YouTube, were linked to the tweets as well.

Lufthansa and Germanwings used a shared crisis communication strategy in Twitter, by posting similar, or even the same messages, and by retweeting each other's posts. Both airlines also mentioned each other in their tweets. As an example of shared communicative goals, both airlines addressed the victims' families and friends several times and continuously expressed their sympathies. Expressing empathy and addressing the families can be seen as an important strategic function of the airlines' crisis communication. The airlines were fairly active in their communication about the crash, especially during the first few days. No other topics were discussed on their Twitter accounts during the first week.

Some differences can be found between the airlines' communication via Twitter. The notable difference was that whereas Lufthansa's tweets were posted only in English, Germanwings' tweets were posted in German, English and Spanish. To provide more information, Germanwings used their website whereas Lufthansa used their Facebook account. Lufthansa also used Twitter and Facebook to inform its followers about them moving on from the crisis and thus with their social media use too. However, this was also suggested by Germanwings through their CEO's video message where he thanked well wishers and helpers.

The airlines did not use Twitter to provide detailed information about the crash and what had lead to it nor was it used to identify victims for instance. Lufthansa and Germanwings did not include media, such as photos, in their tweets, except for the YouTube video presented earlier. Also, when examining the interactivity between the airlines and their customers in Twitter, it could be seen that during their crisis communication the airlines did not actively participate in two-way communication with other Twitter users. The examination of some of the tweets posted on the airline's Twitter account revealed criticism towards the airlines' communication but also expressions of sympathy. However, no discussion between the airlines and other Twitter users was found. The content analysis did not however focus on the tweets posted by other Twitter users and thus the case study does not focus on other users' tweets.

Using YouTube to deliver messages from the CEOs of the two respective airlines not only shows that they are active in other social media, but it also gives a face to those commenting and making statements in social media. In traditional media, the representatives or spokespersons can often be seen in news coverage and press conferences for example, but in social media, especially in Twitter, visuals are not always used. Thus, YouTube is an efficient way to create the same effect, and make communication more personal.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, the use of social media in crisis communication by organisations was examined. The topic was approached by providing theory on the concepts of crisis management and communication, and by examining the changing media environment and how social media has affected crisis communication. In the empirical part of the thesis, a case study was chosen to look at how social media was used by a real-life organisation in crisis communication.

6.1. Conclusions and findings

The research problem of this thesis was based on the need for organisations to change their strategies to meet new ways of communication. Crisis communication is changing due to advancements in technology and the emergence and popularity of social media. This has led to organisations often being too slow in responding to crises and connecting with their stakeholders and the public, which can lead to reputational damage and financial losses, for instance. The research question how organisation can use social media in crisis communication was answered by providing evidence of the changes happening around the media and communication, and by looking at how different social media applications have been used or can be used by organisations. Furthermore, the case study provided an example of how an organisation has used Twitter during a crisis.

What became clear during the research was that crisis communication has always required to be fast and accurate, but it has to be that even faster today. Communication is multi-channelled and not bound to traditional boundaries between organisations and the public. The public has an increasing role in crisis communication through social media, which requires organisations to be present in social media too. Integrating social media with organisations' communication strategies was not considered to be an option, but a must by many researchers. Nonetheless, organisations should not forget communication through traditional media either. Instead, they should incorporate several channels of communication in their crisis communication strategies. Organisations can benefit from

using social media to have more efficient crisis communications, but it creates new challenges as well.

Social media allows organisations to build relationships and trust with their stakeholders by directly communicating with them in social media. During and after crisis, organisations can use social media to provide up-to-date information instantaneously and answer questions. Some of the characteristics used to describe social media were interactivity, openness and conversation. Being open and have two-way conversations with stakeholders is strange for many organisations and requires fundamental changes in the organisations' cultures. However, being able to use the interactive nature of social media, organisations can create a presence among their stakeholders which may help to reduce risks, handle crises and promote renewal.

Openness and presence in social media can also create challenges for organisations. The existence of social media has also led to social media crises which, as their name suggests, are ignited in social media. Organisations have to be ready to react in social media in the event of a crisis as response time is shorter due to the fast paced sharing of information that happens in social media. This can be demanding for organisations as they have to monitor and control several different media and react fast. Multi-channelled communication may also make it hard for organisations to control the large quantity of information. It is important for organisations to know different social media platforms and how their stakeholders use them.

Many guidelines and suggestions on how to use online communication channels, such as social media, exist. To summarize some of the regularly mentioned practices on how organisations should use social media include building a relationship with the public, being open and honest, listening to the public, being accessible, expressing empathy and collaborating with different social media agents. These recommendations are in line with the main characteristics of social media, such as openness and interactivity. Thus, it can be said that it is not enough for organisations to only be present in social media, but in order to communicate efficiently with the public and their stakeholders before,

during and after crisis, they also need to participate in the manner that is expected in social media.

The case study showed that organisations are using social media, not only for daily communication but also for crisis communication. Lufthansa and Germanwings, whose crisis communication was joint, used Twitter to inform the public and their stakeholders about the crisis and what was being done to deal handle it. The airlines' Twitter use was active during the first of the crisis and dedicated only to communication about the crisis. Their communication via Twitter focused on addressing the families of the victims and showing empathy and concern. The crash itself was not discussed in their tweets. The airlines did not use Twitter to inform about the investigation of the crash nor about what had happened and why. However, both airlines used links in their tweets to direct people to their websites and other social media applications, such as Facebook, where further information was available.

6.2. Reliability and limitations

Multiple sources were used to gather data for the thesis, such as literature and articles. For the case study, examples of tweets were presented to provide a real-life example of Twitter use in crisis communication. As qualitative methods were used, the observations and analysis of the data were based on the author's interpretation.

The thesis focuses on the use of social media by organisations. How the public or the stakeholders of an organisation use social media during crises has not been taken into consideration. The effect of organisations using social media on the impact of their crisis communication was not discussed or examined in detail. Also, the thesis did not concentrate on any specific country, and it is important to note that communication strategies can differ between countries.

6.3. Suggestions for future research

Even though social media applications emerged already in the early 2000's, changes surrounding communication and media are still happening. Many organisations still see social media as a new phenomenon, or even as a passing phenomenon. Further research on social media is required, as well as research on its effects on crisis communication. Many traditional communication strategies are challenged by the new communication culture around social media. Social media can also lead to other, sometimes new, phenomena, such as social media crises. Many organisations, sometimes stiff, crisis communication plans and strategies are not applicable to current ways of communication and social media. Thus, further research is required on the field of crisis communication and management as the context in which they function is changing.

Also, it would be interesting to see what kind of strategies organisations can create when planning the use of social media, as the landscape of social media applications changes fast. How to create crisis communication strategies that do not rely too much on social media applications yet incorporate social media requires more research. Crisis communication strategies differ between countries as well as the role and position of social media. What can be communicated and how depend on social norms, for instance. When looking for material for the thesis, country-specific studies were hard to find. Many studies on social media in crisis communication are based on case studies, however, often not describing the how communication is organised in the country. Thus, country-specific research is also needed to gain a more comprehensive view on the matters discussed in the thesis.

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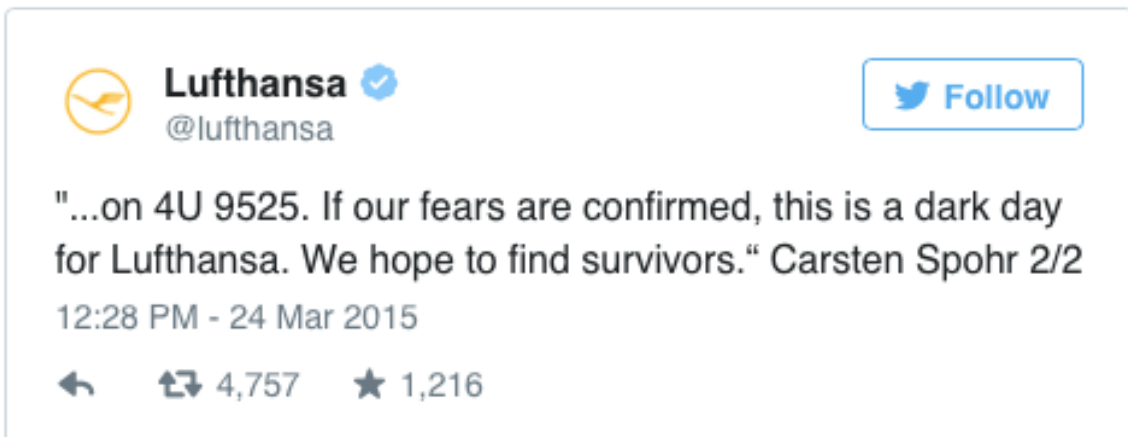
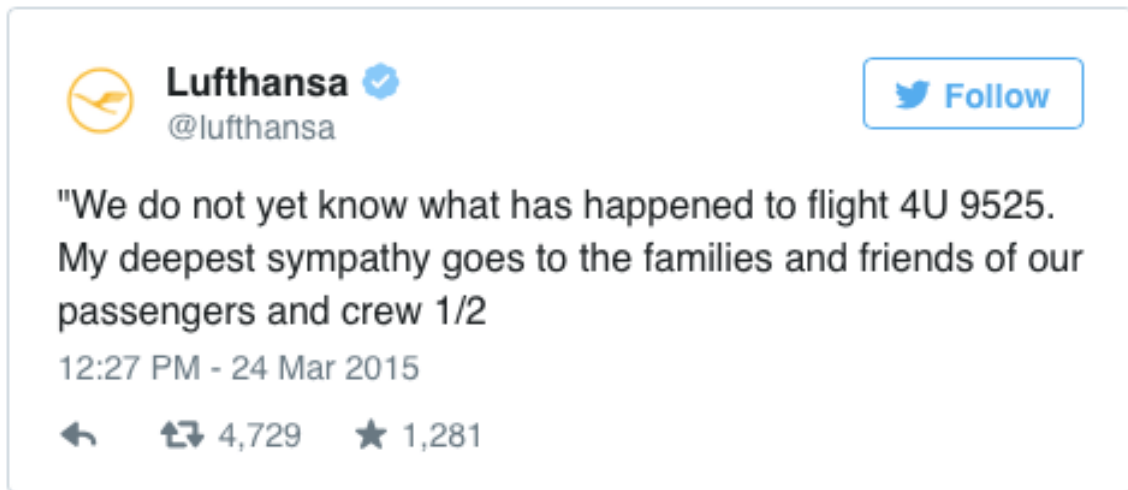
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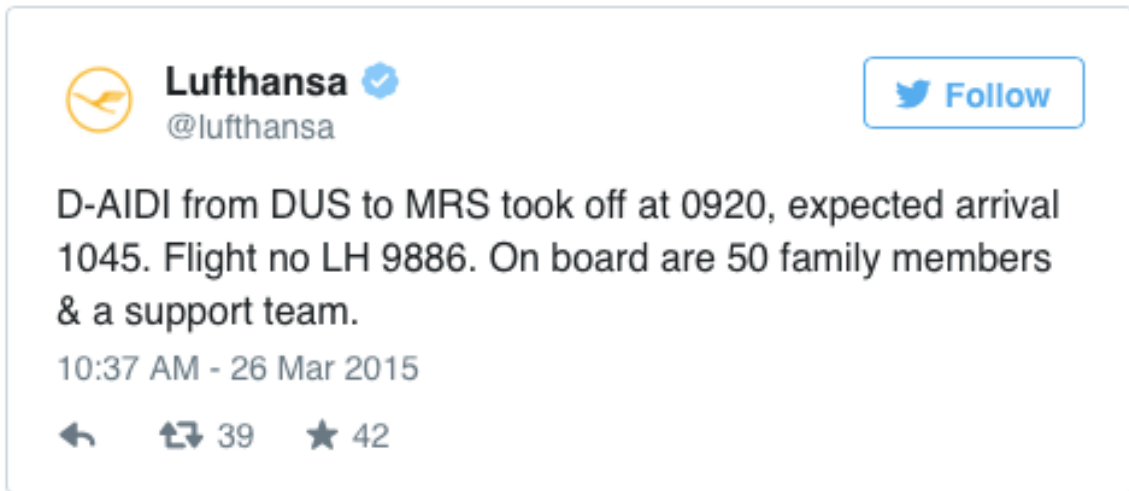
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APPENDIX 1. Lufthansa's first tweet (Lufthansa 2015)



APPENDIX 2. An informative tweet (Lufthansa 2015)



APPENDIX 3. A link to a YouTube video featuring the CEO of Lufthansa



APPENDIX 4. Last tweets (Lufthansa 2015)

